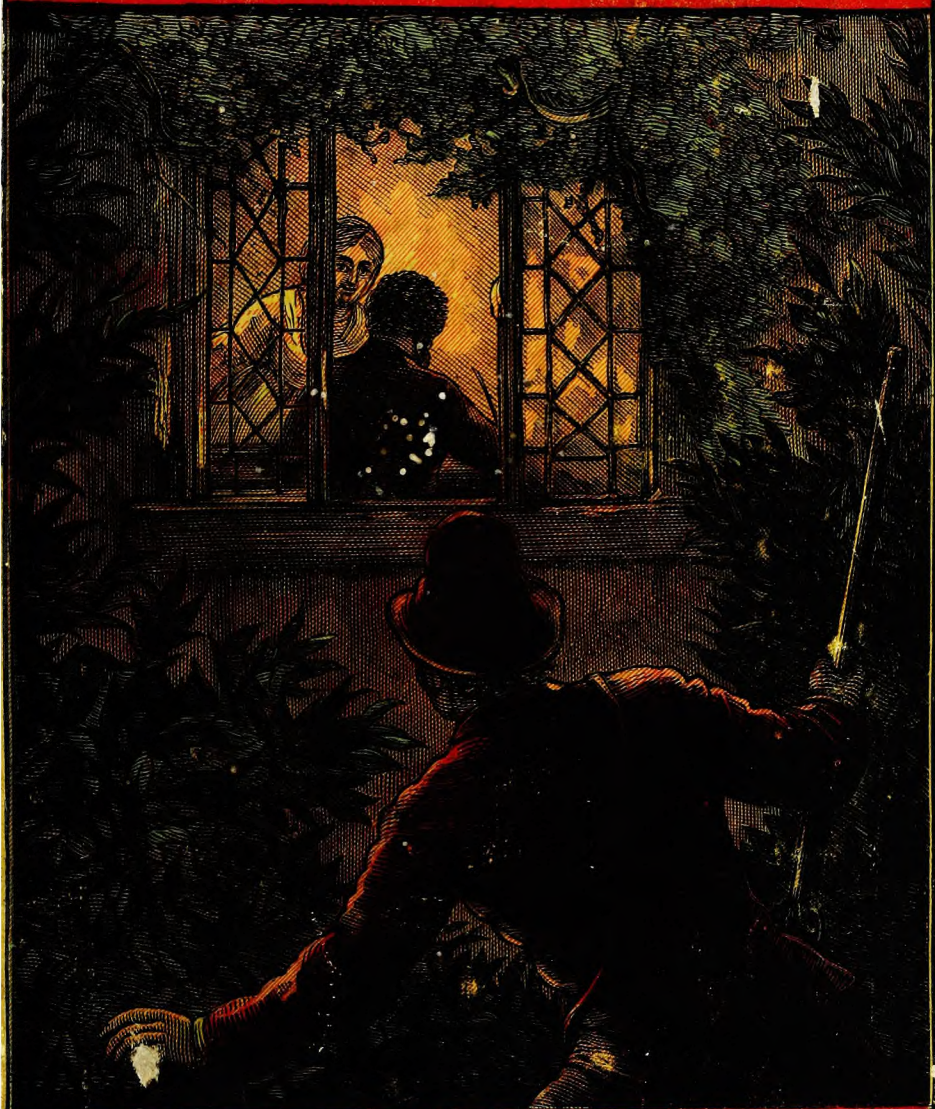


BY THE AUTHOR OF 'OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.'

NORA'S LOVE TEST



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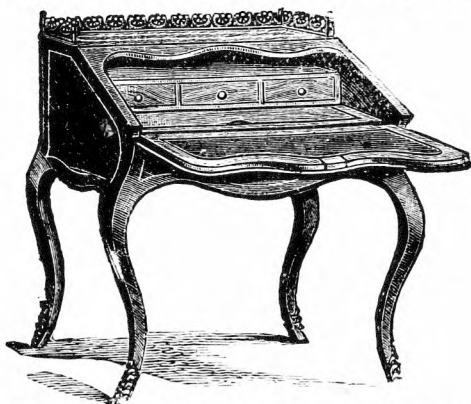
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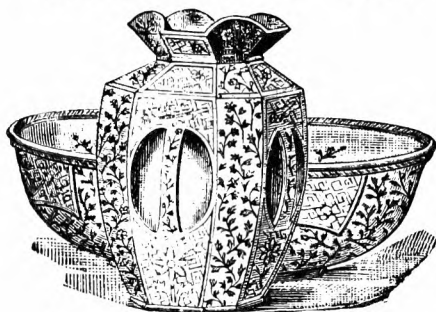
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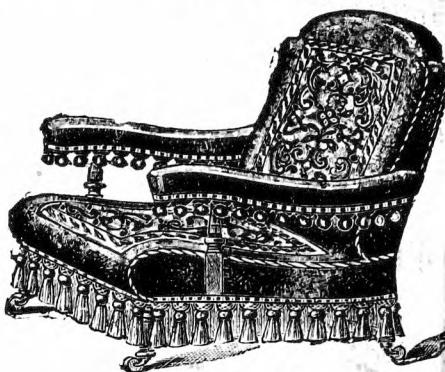
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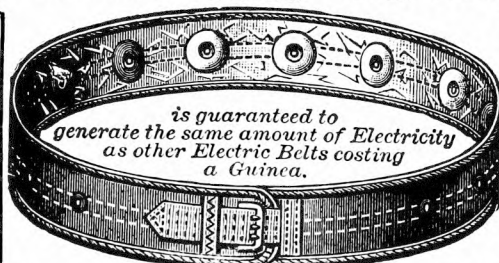
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NORA'S LOVE TEST

A Novel

BY

MARY CECIL HAY

AUTHOR OF "OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY," "THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY,"
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NORA'S LOVE TEST.

CHAPTER I.

He that might the 'vantage best have took
Found out the remedy.

Measure for Measure.

THEY all saw it coming !

The drawing-room windows overlooked the bog—which, from the village on this western side, stretched in a gradual ascent until it kissed the sky far off—so they all saw it coming ! And then the boys laughed and disappeared ; and the girls laughed too, but dared not disappear, however much they wished it. And the Vicar made a little clicking sound with his tongue and the roof of his mouth, suggestive of a calm despair ; while his wife glanced at her guests, in mute appeal for their special indulgence in this trying moment. But only one of the guests met the glance ; and Mrs. Pennington saw with horror that her eyes soon went back to fix themselves on the hideous conveyance which—now heavily and unsteadily, and now with little delusive spurts of comparative swiftness—was making its way with fatal and premeditated directness straight to the Vicarage gate. As for the other guest—well, it did not signify so much about him. Mortifying as it was that Miss Foster should encounter plebeian acquaintances on this first visit of hers to the Vicarage where her brother had been educated, it could not signify much to the strange gentleman, who had merely offered her his escort because he had been himself coming to Ireland—even to this very village—just at the same time.

Mrs. Pennington plucked up all her spirit—it was but a tiny specimen of the frail and brittle kind—and moved a trifle nearer to her lady-guest. By that time the object at which they all gazed was close to the Vicarage gate, its evil intent of passing beyond that sacred portal patent to the meanest capacity among the onlookers—so terribly patent ! The gaunt and aged quadruped, his huge framework clearly developed under his dusty skin, dropped his pinched head, and seized apathetically on the brief rest allowed by the opening of the gate ; and immediately afterwards the old car rattled along the gravel, in a manner

peculiar to itself, composed of a forward plunge, and then a backward jerk, and then a temporary subsidence into a one-sided, lively totter. The boys had let the gate slam, and were running with the car; while the young girl who was its solitary occupant, being too much engrossed by the management of her steed to see the faces at the window as she passed, could yet let off a few random shots among the boys, and laugh full as heartily as they did at her own unique arrival.

"Jump up on the other side the car, Nat, and balance it; then you'll see how smoothly we shall go round to the stables. You may well laugh, Tom. Isn't Borak fresh to-day?"

And then again the girl's laugh was the merriest of the three.

"Of course I cannot be mistaken," murmured Miss Foster, turning graciously to the Vicar, "but I should hardly recognize your sons who were sitting here so decorously a few minutes ago."

The Vicar breathed a modest reminder of the fact that "boys will be boys," but his own chagrin was plainly readable in various little red settlements upon his unwrinkled brow.

"And may I inquire," added Miss Foster, in the most soothing of tones, "what name you have for that extraordinary vehicle?"

"It purports to be a jaunting-car," said the Vicar, suppressing in haste his own involuntary smile, "but it certainly is a curious specimen. Old Colonel St. George had a crippled carpenter to come into his own yard and make it, at odd moments, under his supervision, giving the man only his food in payment—the day rarely dawns when the old Colonel brings out *money* for anything. I daresay you noticed what a bare machine it is—guiltless of padding, cushions, or even paint; and it needs only that bony old animal to be put in—the Colonel took him in exchange for a pig six years ago—to make it the most disgraceful turn-out in County Tyrone."

"Miss Pennington, let us go into the garden; shall we?"

It was the other guest who made this proposal to the Vicar's eldest daughter, while he held open the window that she might pass through.

"I'm so glad," said Celia, in a little flutter of delight. "It seemed so odd not rushing out to meet Nora."

Her companion was walking idly, as if he had no aim this April afternoon, except to let its hours pass him by; yet at her words his step grew slower still.

"Was that Nora in the shanderydan?"

Celia's eyes twinkled.

"That isn't a shanderydan, Mr. Poynz. How plain it is to see you are not Irish! Isn't it a frightful old car? And yet Nora is as pleased as possible when her grandfather lets her drive it. You should see her sometimes driving across the bog, standing on the footboard, and wasting far more strength in trying to get

the horse to trot than she would need to walk twice the distance."

"Then her parents do not forbid——"

"Nora has no parents," interrupted Celia, in those staid young tones of hers which so often amused the boys. "And her grandfather—that's old Colonel St. George—doesn't care anything about what she does. Besides, you see, everybody knows her; and I really think"—with a little access of confidence—"that there isn't a man or boy in the neighbourhood who wouldn't run anywhere at Nora's bidding. Indeed I often notice that even papa—even papa," repeated the girl impressively, "hasn't quite such influence over them as Nora has. And yet she is so terribly wild."

Mark Poyntz looked down into the girl's gentle eyes. "And untamable?" he asked, in his cool indifferent way; but he did not even hear Celia's answer, as they turned from the little lawn into a gravelled path running straight between two bands of tangled flowers.

"This is the garden," said Celia, with a sweeping glance across the sooty onion-beds which lay beyond the flower-borders, and feeling that now she had conscientiously brought him to the goal he had desired. "You will like to walk round, I suppose?"

As Mark not only did not say "No," but actually stooped now and then to pluck a wistful little anemone, or a precocious Canterbury Bell, Miss Pennington led him on all round the straggling garden, making pretty little brisk demands upon his attention, and listening with an astonished, wide-eyed interest to his occasional and rather brief remarks. They left the garden at last, by a well-worn gap in the hedge, and came out near the little coachhouse, at the open door of which Nora stood mending a heavy old whip with some twine which Tom Pennington drew inch by inch from a pocket in whose depth the end lay hidden. The boys had heard no sound of footsteps on the grass, and Nat Pennington—who, with a great deal of noise and commotion, was generously improving the occasion by bestowing an amateur rub-down upon Nora's angular steed—discoursed cheerily over his work—

"I say, Nora, aren't you dying to hear more of John Bull?"

"Yes—dying fast. Pull that knot tight, Tom. Oh, Nat, I saw such a splendid trout round by the moat! I know I could catch him, but I daren't; so I'm going to give you my chance."

"Hoorah! What a jolly girl you are for scenting game!"

He was stopped by the brisk little "Hush!" of Celia, as she darted forward and greeted her friend.

"I never thought to find you here, Nora; haven't you been into the house?"

"Yes; I had a message for Mr. Pennington from grandpa. But I'm going home now."

"Oh, no!" cried Celia, puzzling just for one instant over a new tone in Nora's voice. "Come in again."

"No. Who is that lady in the drawing-room?"

"Didn't they introduce you?"

"No. They—forgot perhaps."

"Then the boys——"

"I didn't ask the boys," interrupted Nora. "Celia, think of my growing up to be seventeen, without once feeling how different I was from—an English lady!"

"Are you?" laughed Celia, with an impulsive kiss.

"Just look at me, and think how the sight of me would astonish a real English lady—if you can."

"I cannot, though. You *are* English, you know, as I am; and I don't see why you shouldn't be a lady as much as I."

"Just look at me," Nora repeated, her low rich voice growing hurried as she glanced down at her faded winter dress. "Think how, if you were not used to me, you would—stare."

Celia looked as she was bidden, laughing the while; but some one else had come forward then, and saw what she saw—a girl with a shabby dress, but a lithe round figure, which had developed to the perfect beauty of womanhood, knowing no constraint; a girl in an old and untrimmed hat, from which the hair hung in one rich and heavy plat behind, while on the temples it peeped in waves which caught the light, and changed and brightened with it; a girl whose features were all too short for perfect statuesque beauty—even the curved upper lip and dimpled chin—but whose teeth were perfect, and whose eyes—long eyes of violet blue with dark and silky lashes—were beautiful beyond words.

"You look—just Nora," decided Miss Pennington, pleasantly dismissing the subject, as she saw that at last that other visitor of theirs had finished his slow process of fastening the anemones in his coat, and had come forward. "Nora, this gentleman is a friend of—Mr. Foster's."

Perhaps because it was difficult to curtsy as she stood against the open door, and perhaps because those last words of Celia's speech had some pleasant meaning in her ears, Nora moved the clumsy whip into her left hand, and frankly offered her right to the English stranger. And then she gravely tied her last knot, while she spoke to him.

"Is Mr. Foster—it seems so strange to call him *Mister*, but of course, as Celia did, I must—is he really a friend of yours? I'm so glad. Is he coming here again soon? And how is he? I suppose you've heard him preach. Does he say anything wise in his sermons? He never did when he was here. It was such a comfort to see that however hard Will studied he never *knew* anything."

"Why a comfort?"

"Because I was longing and longing to be taught—and—and it does persons good to see that school makes no difference."

"I see."

"I don't," smiled Celia. "I've been at school for years, and I should have been very idle if I didn't know a good deal now."

"There is plenty of time, Miss St. George," said Mark Poyntz, looking into Nora's face with a quizzical, questioning gaze, "even if you have wasted all your seventeen years."

"How do you know Nora's age?" demanded Celia, with the look of surprise which sat so prettily upon her. "Did you guess?"

"Hardly," he replied, with great coolness. "I have heard it mentioned."

"How funny!" said Nora, lightly. But she looked with a little more curiosity now at the tall stranger, whose face was lined and rugged, and yet so pleasant to look upon; and whose thick dark hair had countless silver streaks among it. "I couldn't guess his age," she thought, "though he guessed mine so cleverly."

He had walked into the building now, and appeared to be tracing Borak's anatomy with interest, so Celia turned with a whispered aside to Nora—"You'll come in again, of course, dear? I'll introduce you to Miss Foster. Doesn't she look stylish?"

"She looks, I suppose," said Nora, thoughtfully, and making no attempt at an aside, "as girls of our age ought to look. Why do you ask me to stay, Celia? Shall we—shall we," she repeated, with a ring of unconscious hope in her voice, "have tea in the school-room if I stay—just we and the boys together as usual—and idle about and enjoy ourselves? I thought of it all the morning, Celia, and indeed all yesterday, for I knew I was coming with the message. I've got such an awful ghost-story to tell you on the hay-stack. I invented it myself last night. I can't bring things to our pic-nic teas, you know, as I ought. I never can get a cake, or a leaf of fruit, or even an egg; but I thought I could make you a story, and I had the news about the trout for Nat, and I was so happy. But I'll go now," she added, with the struggle for patience which made her merry voice sometimes so low and sad.

"It's too bad of you," pouted Celia.

"Why?" asked Nora, quickly. "Would it be as it used to be if I stayed? Could we really have one of the old pleasant afternoons?"

"No," returned Miss Pennington, finding it difficult to repress her little flutter of anticipation. "I am to dine with the elder ones this evening. Otherwise, dear Nora——"

"Good-bye," said the girl, with a suspicious catching in her breath, as she turned and put the bit between Borak's two re-

maining teeth, doing it gently and skilfully, in spite of a new sensation of trembling in her fingers.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Nora," cried Tom Pennington. "I'll take the car out to the bog for you, while Nat looks out that none of them see, and then you follow."

"D'you think," cried Nora, her cheeks aflame and her eyes flashing, "that I'd grow ashamed of Borak all in a minute because you're ashamed of me? You know quite well that I am proud of him—you always knew it. You know how happy I was when I came to-day. You told me how proud I looked, and we all laughed. Why should anything have changed me? I—I think," she said, with the sudden cadence of sadness in her tone, "it is time we were at home—Borak and me."

"And me," added Mr. Poynz, with a lofty disregard of syntax, which sounded as natural as Nora's own. "I have to cross the bog, Miss St. George. Will you give me a seat in your car?"

It did not need his intent look into the girl's face to see the change which his proposal brought there. The flash of scorn which Tom Pennington's idea had evoked melted as by a breath, and a new, strange wonder crept into her lustrous eyes. Though she did not know who this stranger might be, instinct alone was sufficient to convince her that no one at the Vicarage would question *his* taste. And he had asked to drive on the car which Tom would have surreptitiously led out of sight! He had asked to drive with the shabby girl upon whom Miss Foster had gazed with contempt! All the warm and frank simplicity of Nora's nature resumed its sway, and her assent to his proposal was like the glad and prompt assent of a child. How comfortable they would be, one on each side of the car!

"*Very* comfortable," she said, aloud, more as a conclusion to her thought than in reply to his question, as Mr Poynz left her on the off side of the car, and took the reins himself and his own seat behind her. "I hope you will like driving Borak. He goes *very* well indeed."

"Although perhaps his preference is for standing still," added Mark, as Borak sturdily resisted various dumb suggestions, which probably Mr. Poynz had before now found sufficient with his horses.

"He likes to stand a moment or two just to consider," intimated Nora; "and then he won't stop again till he gets out of breath."

"That's a glorious prospect," asserted Mark, raising his hat to Miss Pennington, as Nora uttered the last of her words to the boys; and Borak, with great solemnity, moved through the open gate with his unusual burden.

With an innate feeling of delicacy, for which she could not have accounted if she had tried, Nora withheld even a glance at the drawing-room windows, and even a wave of the hand, to Celia

while anyone standing at those windows could see her. A gentleman was driving her, a grander gentleman than she had ever seen before, and she was sitting in luxurious idleness ; but still she never wished that Miss Foster could see and envy her.

"What?"

"I didn't speak," returned Nora, in her clear happy tones.

"Didn't you? Why not?"

"If I had, it would only have been to say how nice I felt. Are *you* comfortable there, Mr. Bull?"

"Except for the difficulty of restraining the natural speed of Mazeppa," observed Mark, dryly, "I should be in an exceptional state of bliss, Miss Paddy."

"Paddy!" echoed Nora, turning to him a pair of lovely questioning eyes, over one of which the ugly ribbonless hat was gradually slipping. "My name isn't Paddy."

"Nor is mine John Bull."

"Oh, I see!" she faltered, with a blush, which deepened and deepened, because Mr Poynz did not turn his eyes away to allow her to regain her composure. "I suppose the boys only meant to joke me. I thought it was your name, really."

"Do you like it?"

"No," she answered, honestly, and with that rich light of laughter in her eyes which is almost as rare as exceeding beauty; "I thought it did not fit you."

"My name is Mark Poynz. Does that fit me?"

"Not unless—please don't ask me," she added, gently. "You may be so different, that if I ever knew you very well, I should not think the same as I do now."

"If you ever know me very well," he said, quietly, as he leaned his right elbow on the well of the car, and let the reins lie carelessly in his left, with no appearance of any intention of hastening Borak, "I shall probably have grown to like the name better than I do now."

"Why?" asked Nora, trying to balance her hat equally over both eyes.

"You are very fond of questions. Do you know you asked me half a dozen in a breath the first minute I saw you?"

"Did I? Then that showed you at once how uneducated I was, didn't it? What were they about?"

"Three more! Do you forget what—I mean who—they were about?"

"Yes," said Nora; and then turned her eyes from his, to see what danger Borak had passed safely that that expression of relief should have come into his face, "yes, I quite forg—No, I remember now; Celia said you were a friend of Mr. Foster's, and I asked about him."

"Yes. What do you wish to know?"

"Everything."

"Oh, is that all? Then here it is. The Reverend Willoughby Foster, Curate of Heaton, is in no way different from young Will Foster, the pupil of Mr. Pennington, and the friend of Miss St. George."

The very merriest sound possible, in its gladness and its unconstraint, was Nora's laugh; but it was as swift as it was pretty, and so no wonder her companion—who knew her so little—should smile at the sedateness of her reply.

"It sounded odd for you to speak so of Will, yet it is the truth exactly. He *was* a friend to me indeed—though he wouldn't know me as Miss St. George—and somehow, when we all got found out and scolded Will always tried to get scolded for himself *and* me; do you understand?"

"Not yet," replied Mark, meditatively. "It is a difficult situation to take in. You must have been quite a little girl even when Foster left here."

"I was nearly fourteen," returned Nora, conscientiously, "but being six years younger than Wi—Mr. Foster, didn't take any blame from me, because whatever we did wrong was my fault. He would have been quite good by himself. Why do you laugh?" she asked, with apprehension, for, after that brief spasm of honesty, she was again anxious for her companion's good opinion. "Were you thinking I ought never to have disturbed him at his work in those days?"

"I was thinking how little age has to do with the question at all," returned Mark composedly. "Some natures take the lead even while in leading-strings themselves."

"Of course I should not do it now."

"Of course not."

"Mr. Poynz," said Nora, turning to him with her brows puckered, and an unconscious wistfulness in her eyes, "why do you seem to mean more than you say? Do you really believe that I could help to distract Mr. Foster from his work now?"

"Indeed I don't. On the contrary, I believe you could do it without a shade of help."

"Oh, this is too bad!" cried Nora, her lips quivering as if tears were near, yet her eyes bright with laughter. "You forget that I am grown up now."

"No. That is the one little fact which I remember better than you do. Do you observe that Borak has made up his mind to leave the bog, and take us to the high-road?"

"He always remembers everything!" she exclaimed, in pride. "He knows I should like to inquire after Micky Corr. But wouldn't you like him to trot, Mr. Poynz? You let him walk so very, very slowly."

"I like this pace," returned Mark, placidly. "We can better distinguish the beauties of the bog than if we flew through it at Borak's usual speed."

"There are no bogs in England, are there?" questioned Nora, with a lively sense of superiority here. But before Mark had answered, the prompt question was followed by a sigh; so he did not answer at all. He only looked straight along the road, and conveyed to Borak an unmistakeable hint that he might loiter as he chose.

"I suppose, Mr. Poynz, that all English ladies are like Miss Foster?"

Exactly—Mark allowed, with a sparkle in his eyes which Nora did not see—they were all exactly alike, and Miss Foster had been sent over as a specimen.

"Will never told me," explained Nora, apologetically, "else I might have been prepared. I could see that Miss Foster was very, very clever, and she could see in a minute that I wasn't. I mean that I hadn't learnt anything—not a single, solitary thing!"

"Yes, she would see that in a moment," assented Mark. "The first thing an English girl learns, is to see that sort of thing in another girl."

"They always speak a good many languages, don't they?" inquired Nora, deep in thought.

"They do indeed—'after the schole of Stratford atte Bowe.'"

"And they learn music?"

"Rarely. But they perform upon the piano, and vocally."

"You mean they sing?"

"No, I did not. Then they dance——"

"Oh, I can dance too!" interposed Nora, with a sudden ring of hope in her tones. "Why do you smile?" she added heavily.

"Who it be a different kind of dancing?"

"We shall see."

"No; we shall never see," she said, with a grave shake of her head, "because I shall never go to England."

"That is absurd," observed Mark, with a certain tone of severity in his voice, of which he was himself unconscious. "You are an English girl; why should you live here all your life?"

"Grandpa says we shall," she answered gently. "He's very poor, and cannot go away."

"In-deed!" said Mark. And then he looked round into Nora's face, just as if he were going to laugh quite heartily.

"Sometime," sighed Nora, "I think how delightful it would be to be rich. I should do such wonderful and beautiful things if I were rich. One can't help just dreaming about things, however utterly impossible they are."

"Utterly impossible," acquiesced Mark, in his leisurely way, "unless your grandfather has hundreds of jars full of sovereigns hidden away, like an Irish gentleman of whom I once read?"

"But," said Nora, musingly, "there's no place to hide them

at Traveere—that's where we live, Mr. Poynz, grandpa and me."

"And no one else?"

"No one except old Kitty. No one else ever comes there. I go to the Vicarage whenever I can; but Celia never comes to Traveere, and grandpa won't have the boys. He never would have Will—Mr. Foster, I mean. No," she added, as if to herself, in her soft musical tones, "no one comes but Doctor Armstrong."

"May I ask who is Doctor Armstrong?"

With both hands, Nora set the old hat straight once more, tilting it a little over her eyes; and, while she did it, she glanced under her lifted hand into her companion's face, as if the slight change in his voice had puzzled her.

"Do you know Nuel Armstrong?" she asked, in her grave, direct way.

"Nuel Armstrong? Who is he? The doctor you just spoke of?"

"Yes," she said, feeling this answer had been negative enough. "He is the only person that comes to Traveere. He is a relation of grandpa's, though I don't exactly know how—the only relation grandpa has, except me."

"Then he is a relation of yours?"

"I think not, Mr. Poynz. I have no relation in the world except grandpa. My father and mother both died when I was a baby. They died in England; and I was born in England—I think."

"Why do you only *think*?"

"Because grandpa won't speak of them, or let me: I suppose it would make him sad. And no one else, of course, knows anything about me."

Mr. Poynz was very silent after that, and in the pause Nora's eyes lost their wide, thoughtful gaze, and went across to him once more. How curious it was for him—a stranger—to be driving her along the old familiar road—a stranger, and so different from any gentleman she had ever seen before! Should she be able to tell her grandfather what he was like? How could she begin? Was he young? Surely young, yet how could he have so much gray in his hair and moustache? They quite looked as if they were speckled black and white; and yet his hair was so thick, and looked so different from—"He looks," thought Nora, with one conclusive glance, "like a soldier looks, I should think, when he comes from the battle-field, and takes off his helmet."

"Well," inquired Mark, coolly, "are you objecting to the length of my nose?"

"I—I was only," faltered Nora, with a vivid blush, her eyes shy and timorous, yet still with something fearless in their depths, "thinking of how I should describe you to grandpa."

"You cannot do it; you must take me on to Traveere to show me."

"Please, Mr. Poynz," begged Nora, in a very evident panic, "don't come to Traveere. It is—it won't be any pleasure."

"Is this the cottage at which Borak intends to stop?" inquired Mr. Poynz, as they came in sight of a cabin on the roadside.

And Nora, grateful for not having been forced to explain her last entreaty, nodded her affirmative, and then, springing lightly to the ground almost before the car had stopped, entered the cabin.

Beside the little pile of turf which smouldered on the stones, a young Irishman stood with his hands in his pockets, now and then pushing together the clods of turf with one foot, and staring morosely at the little spouts of flame; with his back turned to the window, near which his younger brother, a delicate-looking lad of about twenty, sat leaning his head wearily against the wall.

Mr. Poynz, who, with a comfortable reliance on Borak's phlegm, had entered the cottage after Nora, looked round with that practised gaze of his which, though so cool and easy, yet took in every item of the scene; and he looked longest at the uncouth form and surly face upon the hearth. Here was a true specimen of the lowest type of Irish vagabondism, rough, ignorant, and cunning; yet, when Nora, in her fearless, natural way, paused a few moments on the hearth to speak to him, Mark saw that, like the generality of his countrymen, he was susceptible to beauty. But when Nora went on to the window, and paused for a longer time beside the younger brother, Mark was glad to look away again from the ugly, lowering face.

Five minutes afterwards Nora timidly touched Mr. Poynz upon the arm, and reminded him that she was ready to go. He turned coolly—he had been standing straight before the dim little fire, with his head raised,—and, while he held the door for her, he looked back and bid good day to the young men; but Nora had a strange and uncomfortable fancy that he had started at her touch, in that first instant—only just in that first instant.

"You were very intent upon that sketch," she said, as they drove slowly on: "I suppose you easily recognised it as an English house?"

Mark actually laughed at the tone of unconscious sadness in her question.

"Not for its beauty, as you seem to insinuate," he said; but presently added, as he stepped down from the car to walk up the incline, in Borak's interest, "though it is a fine old place too. What is it called?"

"It's an English estate, and I think it so beautiful. It's where Rachel used to live as a servant before she married Michael Corr, and her young mistress drew it for her."

"How long ago?"

"I don't know," said Nora. Mr. Poynz, walking beside the car, had come round to her side now. "It must have been a good while ago, because, when she married Corr, his two sons were only little boys; he was a widower, you see. He's dead now, and Rachel has a lot of trouble to get her livelihood. Of course Shan ought to do it," the girl went on, with her grave shake of the head, "but he is too idle. Isn't he ugly, Mr. Poynz? And he generally looks so angry with everybody. I am sometimes almost afraid of him."

"I should not have guessed it."

"Oh, he's quite polite to me!" said the girl, quaintly, "But now and then I find him scolding and sulking, and he looks so bad till he sees me. Will used to say that he was like a walrus, with his unparted hair, and that little straight beard between his chin and his neck—Will called it 'the Newgate fringe'—and his high narrow forehead, and his two teeth sticking out like tusks."

"Let me see," observed Mark, quietly, "you have no serpents here, have you?"

"No, not one. We couldn't have, even if St. Patrick allowed them, because you know it kills a serpent to look at an emerald; and, as our land is all emerald, why, they would all die directly, even if they came."

While she so merrily put this fancy into words, for the first time she looked back at the little cabin they were so slowly leaving behind them.

"Micky is very good," she said, thoughtfully, "and he is getting well. How I wish he could get work that wasn't so very hard as the work Shan makes him do. Micky and I are always wishing there were fairies."

"He seemed to think he had found a fairy to-day," observed Mark. And then, just as if he were sorry he had said it, he pointed with his heavy whip along the bleak road, with its one hedge, and its one side open to the bog, and asked her whether he was to take Borak through that broken gate among the trees.

"That's—that's Traveere." As Nora spoke hurriedly yet timidly, holding the side of the car to steady herself, she sprang to the ground, and walked beside Mr. Poynz. "That's Traveere; but—I won't ask you to go farther. Grandpa may be—asleep."

"But with our united efforts it may be possible to awaken him," propounded Mark, coolly. "I am expecting him to ask me to dine with you. What is that long, grave thought?"

"A silly one," said Nora, taking off her hat, as if the thought were a heavy one, "and a bad and envious one too. I was thinking how splendid it would be to have a nice house and servants, and everything going on so comfortably that if you

brought in friends—I mean visitors—you might be quite easy about it.”

“If you were easy about that,” commented Mark, turning to her with a smile, “you would be uneasy about something else. Ah, you are a true woman, after all!”

For several minutes Nora pondered this speech, vaguely uneasy at the time, though she could not explain why; and then her old fear came back suddenly, for Borak had turned into the short, neglected avenue which—bordered one side by potato ground, and on the other by a field of flax—led up to an old square house, from which the discoloured plaster was half peeled away, and the brick-work crumbling below it.

“Mr. Poynz,” she said,—and no wonder he laughed at her quaint solemnity—“*that's* Traveere. Don't you wonder that travellers don't come to see the ruins?”

“That,” repeated Mark, making a deliberate pause, as he looked intently at the dilapidated old house, “is Traveere, is it? Your home, where you spend the summer days and long winter nights— Child, how do you do it?”

“I am used to it,” she answered, very softly. “And I have grandpa, and old Kitty, and the dogs, and Snow—that's our cow; she's in the house a great deal—and Borak, but *he* never comes beyond the hall; and there are some old books that were grandpa's, and I've a few Will left me, and one Celia gave me once on a birthday. Now,” she went on, with just a little unsteadiness in her low clear tones, “will you come, or will you change your mind?”

The fact of Mr. Poynz not answering this question signified little, as it was so evident that his destination was the ugly old house at which he still gazed; almost incredulously and altogether sternly. So Nora walked on quietly at his side, her mind weighed down by the thought of dinner. There would be nothing in the house—there never was anything in the house—and how could she let Mr. Poynz come on, fancying there would be? What would he think of the bare rooms, and the—— Her thoughts broke hotly through their bonds at last.

“Mr. Poynz,” she said, turning with one fearless glance—not exactly aware that his dress, which sat with such negligent ease upon him, was fashionable and expensive, only conscious that everything about him was out of keeping with what she could show at home—“you'll find things very strange at Traveere. The house itself seems to be tumbling down. This morning Breen said it must be propped; but grandpa never will listen, he never *does* listen when it's about spending money. And even grandpa looks curious; but, please, don't laugh at him. He never buys any clothes. All my life I never knew him buy a single thing. He says he's had his Sunday coat for forty years, and he cuts away bits to mend it every now and then, so that

it's got smaller and smaller, and isn't much like a coat at all now. And—and," added the girl, with a gulp, "we have dinner anyhow—just what Kitty finds to give us. Please don't come."

"And yourself?" interrogated Mr. Poynz, looking all the more steadily on before him, because of the sound of tears in the girl's voice. "Does he buy you nothing?"

"I haven't needed anything yet," she answered, steadily. "I had a very large box of clothes when I grew big; Celia doesn't like them *very* much, but nobody else minds. Besides, they must have been my mother's. Perhaps you've heard all this before, Mr. Poynz, because Nat Pennington says everybody knows about grandpa and me. But here's the stable, and I must unharness Borak, please. Hasn't he brought us nicely? Though he could have come much faster if you had liked."

"No horse ever took me so comfortably before," said Mark, deftly, though still in a most leisurely manner, unfastening the various knots which answered the purpose of buckles in Borak's dilapidated harness. "Now I'm ready, Miss St. George."

They walked on then, among wandering pigs and poultry, to the front door, which, wide open as it was, swayed to and fro upon one hinge.

"I don't think," remarked Nora, as they entered a bare, unfurnished hall, "that there is a single door at Traveere which will quite close. Some have both hinges, but no lock or handle; some have an upper hinge only, some a lower one. They vary a good deal. This way, please."

As she spoke, she with some little difficulty pushed open a creaking door in one corner of the hall, and Mr. Poynz followed her into the most curious room he had ever entered. In one corner a pile of bog-wood reached from floor to ceiling, and had a ladder propped against it. In another, a stack of turf stood half demolished, its thick brown dust trodden well into the thread-bare carpet. Upon the hearth lay at least a dozen dogs and cats; and behind them a small, wizened old man sat straightening the brim of a wretched-looking hat.

"Look here, child," he said, hearing Nora's step, but without troubling himself to look up. "I've got a bargain at last. I found this on a scarecrow up in Elliot's wheat, and so I changed the brim was nearly off mine, and I can soon mend this 'Hal' he chuckled, "this is the first bargain I've met with this year."

"Grandpa," said Nora, the bright pink spreading painfully from chin to brow as she paused beside him, "here is—a gentleman."

"A what?" he asked, screwing his eyes fast, and then opening them as wide as he could. Presently he slowly rose, and

looked beyond her to his visitor, raising his hand once to rub his eyes, as if his sight were dim.

"Who?" he asked then, still looking at the tall, strong figure opposite, while Mark, in his turn, looked keenly down upon his shrivelled form, buttoned in a shabby coat, wearing no collar or waistcoat, and a patched black cap over his bald head.

"Mr. Poynz," whispered Nora, the blush deepening strangely, and her breath coming hurriedly, in her new mortification, as she looked into her grandfather's face.

"From England?"

"Yes, from England," Mark answered, his long gray eyes fixed curiously upon the old man.

"From Surrey?"

"Yes, from Surrey."

"It's chilly, and getting late, child; you can go and prop that window from outside—it flies open. Go quickly, and you needn't come back. Stay here, sir," he cried, querulously, as Mr. Poynz seemed to be going himself to obey this command. "D'you think the child"—never by any other term did old Colonel St. George designate his granddaughter—"hasn't sense enough to manage such a trifle as that?"

For two or three minutes after Nora had left the room, Mr. Poynz stood waiting; but, when her face—still with the cheeks flushed, and the eyes brilliant and restless—had appeared outside the broken window, and was gone again, he turned coolly to the table, and took a seat opposite Colonel St. George.

"May I smoke?"

"Certainly—certainly," acquiesced the old man, again speaking with querulous rapidity. "Is *that* the only question you have to ask me?"

Leaning forward on his unsteady chair, Mark struck a fusee. Not until his cigar was alight, did he raise his eyes to answer calmly—

"No; there are one or two more questions, which I shall be glad if you will answer me—as frankly."

CHAPTER II.

It was this above all things,
This that charmed me, ah, yes, even this, that she held me to nothing.
CLOUGH.

"BLISS me, Miss Nora, what a fright ye put a purrson into. Enough to make 'em die o' compulsions! What's up, me dear?"

But Nora by this time was standing in a melancholy attitude upon the hearth, looking in vain for any sign of dinner; and

Kitty might have repeated her question a hundred times before she could have comprehended this new vague trouble of the girl's.

"Nivir mind," she said, shaking her head cheerfully; "we've no best thin's for ye to throuble to git out for a visitor out o' the commin. If he be's gran'some, let him squench his hunger with his gran'someness. If he ben't gran'some, he'll go smooth enough through a poached egg."

"Is that all we have?" asked Nora. And then, partly in real mortification, and partly in shame at herself because she cared so much, she turned her face away and cried.

"It's a pity but what he'd come yisterday," observed Kitty, going on placidly with her potato-paring, though the sight of Nora's tears was very new to her. "We'd the bit o' biled neck thin, an' it made a purthy dish. But niver ye mind; I'll hot up a bowl o' the broth, an' thin there's poached eggs an' cheese. What's he like, me dear? As handsome a wan as the Dochter?"

"He's as unlike the Doctor," said Nora, ashamed of herself again now, because a smile was chasing away the tears, "as he can possibly be. I wish grandpa would dine in another room, and then I could lay the table myself. But you'll make it look as—as—as little bare and dingy as you can—won't you, Kitty?"

"As ye're so vainful, Miss Nora," remarked the old woman, giving the turf fire a blow with her mouth, "ye'd bitter go an' make yerself purthier. No purrson knows bitter thin meself that ye can't add a cubic to yer size, but ye can shine yerself up, me dear, with a thinner gown."

"So I will," said Nora, wondering she had never thought of this, "and then I can help you afterwards."

Nora's bed-room was a long low room, wainscoted, like most of the rooms in the house; its scant items of furniture were as old and as badly in need of repair as were all the other articles in the house, yet her girlish taste and neatness had devised little methods of making the whole attractive, in a quaint, whimsical, ingenious way. But what of grace or picturesqueness could she supply from her scant little wardrobe?

A faded muslin frock—the fault of which must have been a deficiency of material, even in its palmy days of eighteen years ago—was brought out and shaken, and then donned in perfect and unquestioning content. After that a funny little bow, which might originally have been a doll's decoration, was tied to the end of her long plat; and when she brought the thick coil round to judge of the effect, with no hindrance from her disfiguring old looking-glass, she smiled to herself, thinking how gay she was, and wondering whether Celia would consider she was properly dressed. For hadn't Celia had on a summer dress that very day in the sunshine?

"An' ye've platted yer hair afrish, I do declare!" exclaimed

Kitty, half closing her dim eyes, as she scrutinized Nora on her return to the kitchen. "Well, I'd think that thrubble enough wance a day. I'm glad ye're riddy, though. The Dochtor's round in the yurrd."

"He here!" cried Nora, her tone more disappointed than surprised. "And only six eggs, Kitty!"

"Well, an' won't that be more'n one apiece? I've bin in an' sit the cloth, Miss Nora; yer grandpa an' the gintleman's sat far aparrrt—dade I think the gintleman's farther aparrrt thin yer grandpa."

"And what did you think of the gentleman?" questioned the girl—for she had no one else to question.

"Jist naught," replied Kitty, provokingly devoted to her saucepan; "I jist couldn't look at him for wonthering who could ha' washen his collar and his wristbrins so white—sich a waste o' soap. Ye needn't be lookin' so harrrd at those six eggs, Miss Nora; the harrrdest stare in yer eye won't make 'em eight."

"I shall not go into dinner," the girl said, with a sigh; "I will have some bread and cheese here. There will be only two eggs each even then. Oh, Kitty, if we had but a little money now and then!"

"What be's I to say about ye?" asked Kitty, pausing with the dish in her hand. Headachin's the best complaint furr ye."

"Perhaps they won't ask," said Nora, dismally, as she cut her bread and cheese, "If they do, I'd better have a headache; "but, if they seem sorry, say I shall be better in an hour, and will go in."

"Did they ask?" she questioned, eagerly, when the old servant returned.

"Yis, me dear—one of 'em. Oh, don't be queschinin' me. I furrgit which it wur. I've put everythin' on the table now. Yer grandpa says he won't need me agin."

Nora, forgetting her bread and cheese before she was half way through it, rose, and, passing through the chilly hall, went into a favourite room of hers, where she had tried to make the shabby old books into friends as well as furniture, and had her pet lounging place in a little window-seat in one corner. Here she had sat for only a few minutes, when she fancied that the door behind her had been pushed ajar. But, when she had looked round and found there was no one in the room with her, she fancied one of the dogs had looked in, as he went about in his mert search for food.

So she sat on in the fading light, wrapped in a deep, wide, wonderful thought, which she fancied was only the continuation of an old day-dream, until suddenly she started up and listened, her heart beating, and her eyes soft and radiant. But the step which crossed the hall, and came straight up to her without

pause, was a familiar step, and she leaned back again in her old position, and turned her eyes once more to the pale pink light above the dreary bog.

"Nora," said Doctor Armstrong, speaking coaxingly, as he took up her left hand, which lay nearest him, and pressed his fingers on her pulse, "what has given you a headache to-day?"

"Eggs," answered Nora, laughing; but Nuel Armstrong noticed how swiftly she tried to draw away her hand, and how readily her eyes—so large and beautiful in the pale light—went back from his face to the distant sunset.

He stood a moment in hesitation—angry hesitation, though she did not know it—and then he sat down beside her, still holding the round white wrist in his strong, supple fingers. He was a man of more than forty; yet time had travelled so smoothly with him that his face was unlined, and the glossy surface of his light-brown hair was undisfigured by any silver thread. His mouth was well-formed, though it was weak and sensual, and the long upper lip was bare; but the chin was handsome and almost resolute, and the soft brown whiskers were not allowed to cover it. If any one had told Nora just then that Dr. Armstrong was ten years older than the gentleman who had driven her home that day, she would have laughed at the truth as a jest.

"My dear little Nora," Nuel Armstrong said presently, in a soft plausible voice, "how can I believe you are really suffering, when you look so fresh and so lovely? Yet I feel sure you would not tell me a falsehood."

"I did," acknowledged Nora, with a nod. "At least, I let Kitty do it for me, which was worse. I had reasons. I'm coming in presently, though, to grandpa and Mr. Poynz."

"He—you've seen him then?" Dr. Armstrong had changed his speech too swiftly for Nora to notice it; and while she looked so far away upon that fading sunset light, of course she could not see the furtive watchfulness of his steady gaze into her face.

"Yes; he came home with me to-day. He is a friend of Will's."

"I think," observed Doctor Armstrong, his voice low and harsh, "that, after a three years' absence, it would be maidenly for you to say *Mr. Foster*."

"I suppose so," she asserted, simply. "Celia did. Nuel, where is this verse? It's like hundreds of others; it haunts me without my having a notion where I saw it—

Well-grown and well-compacted was that redoubted guest;
Long were his legs and sinewy, and deep and broad his chest;
His hair that once was sable with gray was dashed of late;
Most terrible his visage, and lordly was his gait.

If I were educated," mused the girl, "I should know who that was."

"And what the happier would you be?" inquired Nuel Armstrong, laying one hand upon her shoulder, with a hasty touch which made her shrink. "Wait a little while, and you shall be educated with a care and watchfulness which few girls know. Every step of your education shall be an hour of bliss, my darling; and every lesson you are taught shall be on a theme that women love."

"I saw Miss Foster at the Vicarage to-day," Nora said, without staying to consider what Nuel meant. "She came with Mr. Poynz to Ireland. She looked so—so elegant, and she is so educated, Nuel."

"She came with Mr. Poynz, did she?" he queried, looking into the girl's face with a smile which she did not understand. "Then we may naturally conclude that they two are about to become husband and wife."

"Are they, d'you think?" she questioned, bringing her eyes back to his face for a moment—for she had for years been told what a very clever man Dr. Armstrong was—"How strange that I never thought of that!"

"Why strange, my darling? Others being in love is nothing to you."

"I wonder what it's like"—Nora spoke in her fresh untroubled voice, though her smile was a little dreamy—"to be in love."

"Like!" repeated Nuel Armstrong, rising and standing over the girl's leaning figure, as he answered in a rapid, unsteady whisper. "It's like no other sensation on earth—no other! It makes life one long strain after *something*, that is misery as well as happiness. It makes us helpless to rule our own destinies—for good or ill. It makes a man stand in one narrow spot, holding all his world in his arms, while his heart burns and his brain aches. It makes the world so small to him that all its beauty is in one face, all its music in one voice, and all its rapture in one kiss."

She had risen then, and was looking at him in simple, pained surprise. He was so moved—this quiet clever man to whom she had been taught to look up with admiration—so moved!

"I don't like to hear this," she said frankly, though very gently. "I don't wish to think it. I should like to think that love makes us happier and better; that instead of making the world smaller, it makes it larger and more beautiful to us, and makes us help to make it larger and more beautiful for others. That is my fancy, Nuel, and I like the fancy. Besides, I dare say if I were to ask some one else——"

His face darkened at her simple words, as if they had a covert meaning.

"Don't ask anyone else," he said, in his harsh, authoritative tones; "it is not right for a girl to do."

"Nuel," cried Nora, with burning cheeks, stepping farther

from him, "you say strange things to me sometimes. If you are much older and very clever, and I am so—so ignorant of everything, and so uneducated——"

She broke down there, and stopped, for fear of being betrayed into tears before him, but he started forward and caught her hand hurriedly.

"Educated!" he cried, with a hard, quick laugh. "You will be educated soon enough, Heaven knows! Have patience, Nora; it is not time yet."

"Take your hand away, please," she said, looking gravely up into his face, utterly unconscious that he could read some new courage there, beyond the old fearless, child-like spirit; "I am going to grandpa."

Rather slowly, and almost timidly, she pushed open the door of their general sitting-room; but in the first moment of her entrance she saw (even though only one meagre candle burned in an old metal sconce against the wainscot) that, except for her grandfather's spare little figure in his cushionless arm-chair, the long room was empty.

"Oh, you're up again, are you?" he said, scrutinising her. "Armstrong went an hour ago to fetch you to say good-bye to the Englishman, but he found you were gone to bed."

CHAPTER III.

O earth, that soundest hollow under me.

TENNYSON.

WHILE Nora had sat dreaming, at that favourite window of hers on the western side of the house, Mark Poyntz, smiling a little over her sudden illness, as if he were a connoisseur in whims of all kinds, walked down the old avenue—so silent and shadowy in the April twilight—and out into the road which skirted the bog, and along which he had driven Nora that afternoon. Perhaps he was thinking of the drive, and emulating Borak's pace, for, though he walked without pause or looking back, his step was slow and leisurely. And there was another similarity too, for, when he reached the cottage on the roadside, at which Borak had stopped, *he* stopped too. A woman stood in the open doorway, and he began to talk to her in the coolest, and easiest and most natural way possible; and when, two or three minutes afterwards, he was sitting on her hearth, with her and her invalid son, it all seemed the most ordinary thing in the world. He sat just opposite the little sketch of the English house; and what more natural than for him to speak of it, and to admire its pretty frame of bog-oak? And then what more natural than for the Englishwoman—

who through all her early womanhood had lived among the English gentry and recognised one of them by instinct—to tell the story of that house, so far as she knew it? And Mr. Poyntz sat and listened, looking now into the low turf fire, and now up at the pretty little sketch, but without a shade of weariness, and never without a pleasant look of interest on his firelit face.

“Beautiful! You may well say so, sir. It was the most beautiful house I ever saw, and Miss Kate painted it just like. Notice that one wide low window between the two towers, will you, sir? That was the young master's room. The window opens like two doors, you see, on to those wide steps; and then that path leads straight to the lake—just a mile the lake is round—and the park slopes down to it all round, you see. Notice that, please, before I go on with my story. The young master—the master he was by all rights, though we always called him Mr. Arthur—lived a good deal of his life in this room, for he'd always something in hand, an invention, or an improvement, or a discovery; and instead of riding after the hounds, and shooting and farming, like other gentlemen, he would shut himself up there; and sometimes there'd be a smell of chemist's things, and sometimes there'd be the steam of engines, and sometimes there'd be great litters. But still it didn't matter, for, even if I was sent to clear the room, Mr. Arthur helped me, and did twice as much as I did. Miss Kate went into his room but rarely, for she was always with the old lady—by the old lady, sir, I mean Mr. Arthur's great-aunt, who owned the money that was to free all the land, which for years had been getting smaller and smaller, until poor Mr. Arthur owned little beyond the park. The very house, they used to say, was pawned like over his head. But old Mrs. Say had more money than would buy back all the big estate that went with the title coming to Mr. Arthur; and old Mrs. Say was dying slowly now, in this very house. What sort of an old lady, sir? Why, about the very worst sort of an old lady anybody could possibly know! From morning to night, and from night to morning, she woke only to eat and scold, and make Miss Kate's life a long, miserable slavery. Why she came to stay with Mr. Arthur through that whole year of fault-finding we never could make out—and we always thought it dangerous—but that she should have brought poor Miss Kate, to show how she could martyr a patient, pretty young girl, we thought more dangerous still. Miss Kate was some sort of a relation of the rich old lady's; but we always felt it was more her kind-heartedness than her need of a home, that kept her at her tiring, thankless post. So time went on, and the only wonder to us was that their patience held out so long, especially Mr. Arthur's, for I don't think he ever came near her bed—she lay in bed that whole year—without having spiteful words said to him about his want of money, and the

misery of that great house with so few servants in it. I know I wanted often to advise her to go out of it; but somehow we always remembered in time that her money would soon be Mr. Arthur's, and—of course I know it was wrong, sir, but how could we help it?—and wished the time would come quickly.

"A whole year passed, as I said, and Mrs. Say got worse only in her temper. Any hired nurse would have left long and long before, but Miss Kate cared for her, and watched her still, patient and faithful, and Miss Kate's great help was a gentle old Indian woman who had been her own nurse. She was a help to us all, besides taking a great deal of responsibility off Miss Kate, and some of the labour too, though old Mrs. Say still persisted in worrying either Miss Kate or Mr. Arthur over every blessed trifle. But when a second winter came round, she got really worse, though slowly, and if we'd known it no other way, we should have known it by her terrible fretfulness and spite.

"I needn't make the tale very long, though, need I, sir? One night—she'd been awake all the evening, and very violent—the doctor having to go out himself, sent his young assistant up to the Hall with a little phial, and he was himself to explain the contents to Miss Kate. She was to pour just six drops into water, and give it to the sick lady if she could not rest or sleep through the night—not more, on any account. Mr. Arthur was present, and listened as well as Miss Kate, for he often sat up with her through most of the night. I so well remember my last visit into the sick-room that night. The old lady lay fretting and complaining even in her sleep; Miss Kate sat by the bed, close to the little table which held the medicines, her hands folded, and a great weariness in her attitude; Mr. Arthur sat before the fire, far from the bed, looking thoroughly worn and despondent, but wide awake. In the outer room the nurse sat sleeping in an easy-chair—for a night or two of wakefulness always wore her thoroughly out, and she was obliged to make up for it. I had begged Miss Kate to let me sit up this one night, but she wouldn't hear of it; so I went away heavy-hearted enough, but not much more so when we servants—there were so few of us, you see—had been for many a night past.

"In the pitch darkness of the winter night I awoke in a great tremor, for some one had come noiselessly into my room. I don't know to this moment who it was, for the instant I heard the summons I rose and went to Miss Kate—for two or three nights I had slept in my clothes, expecting this very call. Mr. Arthur had gone for the doctor, Miss Kate was pressing brandy through the closed teeth, the old nurse was chafing one hand out I saw in a minute that all these things were too late.

"When did it happen?" I whispered to the nurse. And she

whispered back, with her lips quite white, "I was asleep. I shall never forgive myself, for I was asleep." The doctor came just then—the young assistant who had been sent with the sleeping drops the night before, for Mrs. Say's own doctor had not yet returned home—and he went through some forms, which showed themselves at once as forms to us all, because we knew so well that nothing could be done now. But we all knew what it meant when he took up the phial, and found it empty. And when he looked from it down upon the old lady, we knew she had died by poison.

"That day went on, sir, and the next, and I can never tell you how we came to know it first. The surgeon who found and carried away the empty phial, could tell that part of the story better than I, but at last I understood the suspicion, though I don't know whether any one else did; for not one word could I utter of it to my fellow servants. On the third morning there was an inquest called, and the young doctor, I believe, made it all clear enough, and we were all made to help. I don't know what was said, but everybody soon knew that Mr. Arthur was sorely in need of the old lady's money, and very tired of her tempers, and had had to drop the poison because Miss Kate had fallen asleep beside the bed, and the old nurse had never awakened at all in the outer room. But something prevented its being possible to end the inquest then—either the great London physician hadn't finished his examination, or the sudden heavy fall of snow had kept away somebody who was important—at any rate, the inquest had to be adjourned, as they said. When Mr. Arthur came in, latest of all of us, from this first inquest, I was in the little sitting-room, at the foot of that east tower, sir,—you see the two narrow windows—sitting with Miss Kate. I had brought in tea for two, thinking Mr. Arthur might like to see it when he came in out of the snow and dusk, as I have a fancy that tea laid in a room gives it a homely look—and goodness knows the old Hall could not feel very homely that day to anyone. When Miss Kate heard his step, she got up very quietly from her seat, and stood with her face hidden on the chimney-piece. 'Don't go, Rachel,' she said, very low; but though she'd been crv'ng a great deal, I saw she wasn't crying then.

"Mr. Arthur came into the house silently, yet with a hurried step, I fancied, and I heard him pause in the doorway, as if looking out; and then he entered the room slowly and quietly—Ah! no wonder we'd all seen the last of any life or spirit about Mr. Arthur! He went up to the fire, and stood opposite Miss Kate, telling her what I've said about the inquest. I looked first at one pale face, and then at the other; and then I went out of the room without a sound, and shut myself in my bedroom, and cried for hours. I didn't know why, sir—I scarcely know now,—yet, when I recall the two faces, even to-night, a little of the same

misery seems to come back to me. I fancy I see her now as she looks intently up at him, her lips shaking, her eyes dark and miserable as they search and search his face; and I see him, all his features stiff and still, yet his eyes trying to look easily and kindly upon her as at other times, when this darkness had not lain over the house.

"As I came down again from my room, I stayed at one of the windows on the stairs, partly that I might look out on the snowy scene and get my eyes to lose the marks of tears, and partly in my silly unwillingness to pass the room where that strange death happened: and, as I stood looking out, Miss Kate's old nurse came gently up and stood behind me. 'What do you see?' she whispered, anxiously. I had seen nothing then; but it made me watch, and in a minute or two afterwards I turned sharply round, and, passing her, ran noiselessly downstairs and into the little sitting-room where I had left Miss Kate and Mr. Arthur. Miss Kate was sitting there alone, her face bowed in her hands; and, when I told her, whispering and stammering, that the house was watched, she only raised it very slowly and wearily, and looked me in the face, dazed like. 'Please tell Mr. Arthur,' I entreated; 'please warn him.' 'You go,' she said, almost in her natural tones. 'He is in the library.' That's the room, sir, that I told you of, with the wide window opening to the steps. I knocked at the door again and again, but got no answer; so at last I tried the handle, and found the door was locked on the inside. When I went back to Miss Kate, I expected her to be nervous and frightened; but somehow I could not help fancying she was not surprised at all. But, when I told this to the nurse, she cried like a baby. 'If he attempts to escape on such a night as this,' she said, 'it will be as if he walked straight into prison of his own accord.' And then, as she had done a hundred times before, she clasped her hands and moaned piteously, 'Oh! If I could but have kept awake just that one night!' It was pitiful to hear her—as I'd heard her so often, when she thought no one was by—moaning this, with her hands folded, and the longing on her face just like a prayer.

"Of course I knew, just as well as anyone, that no escape could be possible for Mr. Arthur that night. The snow lay quite six inches deep all round the house, and yet there was no hope of another storm which could hide the deep marks which any footsteps must make. Hour after hour went on, and Miss Kate seemed to have no thought of going to bed; so nurse and I sat up too, listening keenly to every sound, yet dreading, above all, the opening of that one door into Mr. Arthur's room. It was still about half an hour before the hour at which we had calculated there would be daylight, when a long, sharp ring at the hall bell startled us both. Miss Kate had drawn the bolts even before I reached it, and was standing there with the lamplight

behind her, and just the faintest daylight on the snowy scene before, with her head bent forward, listening eagerly to a man who had come up into the very doorway. I soon knew what it was, though I hadn't heard the first words. This man had, as he went round the house, even before the first glimmer of dawn, seen footmarks in the snow, and had traced them from that wide window of Mr. Arthur's room down to the lake. There were no prints of returning steps, and he must be allowed to enter that room. I don't know what more he said, because that was such a terrible morning for us all. Mr. Arthur's door was broken open—for, though we could easily have walked in through the window, it was not allowed, because of those footprints in the snow—and the room was empty. Though I was not allowed to go in, I saw that it looked only as it had looked to me day after day for years. From the open window those marks of footsteps lay clear and deep on every step and down the gravel path and to the lake. The very fact alone, so I heard it said, of their keeping to the path, through the thick covering of snow which made garden and park all one, would have proved them Mr. Arthur's; but there never could be any question, of course. His boots were brought, and fitted exactly—and certainly no other man's foot about the place would have been so small—and to make certainty more certain, when they stopped at the lake, his watch lay on the ground where the snow was beaten and disturbed down to the water's edge, telling its own tale as plainly as any words could tell it. And all round the lake, *except in that one spot*, the snow lay deep and undisturbed.

"Yes, sir, they dragged the lake, and once, from quite the middle, they brought up Mr. Arthur's coat; but the body was never found. I remember Mr. Arthur's cousin, who came over soon—he was the gentleman who got the estate and all the money—said the body was never likely to be found, because the lake was full of such dangerous holes, and I heard the magistrates say so too. Years and years before, one of the children from the Hall had been drowned there, and the body never found. That's the story, sir. Do you wonder that we few servants who had loved Mr. Arthur, should have left when he died, even if we had had no other reason?"

"And Miss Kate?"

"Miss Kate," returned the woman, quietly, "went away from the Hall with her old nurse. I don't know where they are now. I think her heart was broken. Poor Miss Kate!"

"Was there no faint chance of this crime having been committed by Miss Kate or the nurse?" asked Mr. Poynz, speaking in his usual leisurely tones, but looking into the woman's face earnestly and intently.

"They thought of that, sir, as they seemed to think of everything," Rachel Corr answered, simply—and it was plain

to see that the thought had been familiarised to her long ago—"but they could not think it long. Nurse slept so soundly they only awoke her by an effort, and Mr. Arthur himself had acknowledged that he did not sleep at all that night, and that the nurse had never entered the bedroom until after the death. Miss Kate's story was just as short. She had sat beside the bed all night, the table with the medicine on it by her; she had given the six drops at midnight, and after that she might have dozed a little, as the sick lady went to sleep at once. It was about four o'clock when Mrs. Say sprang up in such agony, and then fell back dead."

"Was there no chance of her having taken the drops with her own hand?"

"Utterly impossible, sir, as her hands were helpless."

"And—your story has interested me greatly, and you must excuse my asking these questions—was it quite impossible, too, that anyone could have been rescued from the lake?"

The woman's eyes were full of a natural quiet surprise, as she turned them on her questioner.

"I haven't told my story very well, sir," she said, "or you would have understood. The snow on the lake shore was untouched all round, except in that one place where the foot-steps led to the water, but not *from* it. Could anything be plainer, sir? The boats were both in the boat-house, which was locked, and had been locked for months. And, sir, beyond all this," added Rachel, sadly, "where he fell, the soil and grass had been clutched at last—desperately, they said."

"I will not ask you any more," said Mark, his voice full of sympathy, as he rose; "and I am much obliged to you for interesting me so. If I chance to stay in Ireland over to-morrow, may I call in again? I have a proposal to make to your son."

"To Micky, sir?" inquired the woman, with a smile towards the sick lad's chair. "I shall be very glad, sir. He's like my own, is Micky."

Mr. Poyntz, leaning with one hand on the kitchen chair from which he had risen, understood in this speech an unexpressed reservation with regard to her elder step-son, but did not notice it in words.

"Then good evening now," he said, and offered his hand both to Rachel and the sick boy.

"Micky," said his mother, coming back thoughtfully to the fire, after watching her visitor as far as she could in the gloom, "I like him—don't you, dear? He didn't look tired of me and my story."

"He knew the house, mother," observed Michael. "His eyes went rightly to every spot afore you pointed it out. I watched him, and I'm sure—I've nothin' to do but watch now,

have I? Mother," he went on, presently, looking up at her as she stood beside him, "I've bin thinkin' another thing while I listened to ye—It's little I do but think now. Was that young docthor you've bin speakin' of Docthor Armstrong?"

"Doctor Nuel Armstrong—yes."

CHAPTER IV.

A message from the blest,
Or bodily unrest;
A call to Heavenly good,
A fever in the blood;
What are ye, vague desires?
What are ye?

IN the frail shivering circle of light afforded by an attenuated candle from one of the old metal sconces which were fixed here and there on the walls of Traveere, Nora sat after Mark Poynz's departure, deep in study. The book was a dilapidated old dictionary, *minus* many important pages, but Nora had decided that she need not fret for the missing pages until she knew all the others by heart.

"By that time," she mused, as with pride she found herself quite in the middle of the first page, and rested a few moments to glance at the end, and see with satisfaction that there were but five hundred and seventy-one, "I shall be educated in lots of things, because, of course, a dictionary explains everything so exactly. Abecedarian, *s.*, a teacher of the A B C. Abed, *ad.*, in bed or on the bed. Aberration, *s.*, an alienation of mind. Abet—"

Her hands, which held the book so very close both to her eyes and to the candle, dropped in her lap with no apparent unwillingness, as the creaking bed-room door was pushed back upon its solitary hinge; but the old servant's entrance could not surprise her, as her ears had followed the heavy footsteps down the long bare passage.

"A purthy lenth of a way this be's for me to be sent afther ye, Miss Nora," Kitty said, seating herself on a box in the gloom near the door. "Put away that rustful old book, an' come down—the Docthor's waitin'."

"Not for me," responded Nora, returning sedately to the study of her dictionary. "I'm engaged, you can say."

"Saints alive! An' who be y' engaged to? That's what he'll ask, me dear. I can't tell lies 'thout a bit o' toime to think 'em through. Now I can't wait. There's my kitchen all through-ther, an' yer grandpa helpless and cross, rubbing his bald cap jist as if his battered ould head had hurrt him."

"Presently," said Nora, glancing kindly across at the old

woman, "I shall teach you to place words properly in your sentences, Kitty, but first I must study a little more myself."

"D'ye think it be's larnin' I want?" asked Kitty, briskly. "Bless ye, no; we're forbid it in the Book. I've hurrd it often. We're to be like lilies an' sparras an' thim as know nothin'. Now thin, Miss Nora, I can't stay here, 'thout you let me go down."

"Go whenever you like," laughed Nora. "I'm not coming."

"Thin wha'il I say to the Docthor?"

"Remind him that an hour ago I went to bed," replied Nora, quietly. "He will understand *that*."

Left alone once more she raised the old book again in her right hand, close to the candle, and brought forward the thick plat and held that with her left, as if an occasional twinge were necessary to pull her up to her task. Presently a footstep sounded outside the house, making a deliberate pause under the scantily shaded, but still more scantily lighted, windows of Nora's bed-room, before passing on out of hearing. Then Nora put down her book and rose, lifting her arms above her head for a few moments, as if close application were unusual with her, and its effects to be got rid of as early as possible.

"Goin' down agin' are ye?" ejaculated Kitty, when, on her way up to her bed, she heard her young mistress's step in the dark—for Colonel St. George allowed no candles to be carried about the house. "Sure that's quare; an' I'm jist afther tellin' the Docthor yer own messegas, as ye'd bin in bed an' asleep fur hours, as he know it 'thout tellin'—yer own words, me dear."

"If I am ever obliged to send for sorrow," said Nora, laughing, as she stood a minute in the dark, with one gent's hand on the old woman's shoulder, "I shall send you. ~~You~~ would be sure to bring me something else."

The gloomy sitting-room, where Nora had left her grandfather, was empty and in darkness: so she went across the hall to an equally gloomy room at the back, which was the old Colonel's bed-room. No candle was burning there when, in answer to her rap, he had bidden her enter; but through the unshuttered and uncurtained window there came just light enough for her to distinguish the small bent form standing on the hearth.

"What is it, child?" he asked, as he went on winding his huge silver watch by feeling.

"Only to bid good night, grandpa," Nora answered, depositing a warm though somewhat brief kiss upon his lean cheek, "and just to ask you how you are, and how—you've enjoyed yourself?"

"If that's all, you'd better go to bed," rejoined the old soldier, with martial brevity.

"Grandpa," inquired Nora, placidly, "are you glad the English gentleman came?"

"Glad, child! What did it matter to me?"

"Then, of course," pursued Nora, conscious of a keen diplomacy, "you're very glad he has gone away—for ever?"

There was no answer, so the conclusion of the sentence came in wistfully—"Isn't he grandpa?"

"No, confound him! He's as likely as not to turn up to-morrow. Go to bed, child."

Nora kissed the old man again, urged by some irresistible impulse, and then she left him in the dark, standing by the one piece of property which seemed precious to him—a small iron safe fixed into the wall between his bed and the fireplace. The girl's step was light as she re-trod the long passages in the dark, and, by force as much of her own bright thoughts as by the natural force of contrast, her candle seemed to emit a radiant light. From a chair—where it had lain since she had thrown it off that evening, to prepare for dinner with her new guest—she took the untrimmed hat which had to-day, for the first time, struck her as a piece of head gear which might possibly be considered curious in civilized society. Surely she could find something to put upon it which would make it look neat for church on the morrow.

On her knees before her musty old hair trunk, which she had dragged within the light of the candle, the girl took each separate article from its place, thoughtfully examining it, and laying it aside with regret when she found it useless for her purpose. Poor child! How few things there were over which she could be doubtful even for those few moments of hesitation!

At last there came a longer pause and then a smile. She had found an old black lace veil, which had never once been opened since it had been folded by other hands than hers, and she held it quite tenderly. Wouldn't it make the shabby brown hat look quite different? Hadn't even Celia herself had a hat trimmed with lace last summer? Perhaps even Miss Foster would have one to-morrow! These happy thoughts ran through her mind as she twisted the veil round the high-peaked crown; and lightly and deftly tacked the ends. Then in a perfect content she put the hat aside for the morrow. There was no need to try it on, even if she could have seen herself properly; so she put it away with great care and tenderness, foreboding nothing of the amusing remarks it would on the morrow elicit from Miss Foster, or the shamed blushes with which Celia would, with a sigh, acknowledge that it was a pity Nora looked "so odd."

Anticipating nothing of this, with a light step, and now and then a soft cheerful snatch of song, Nora prepared for bed; and, when she had given her last pleased glance at the worn hat with its funereal decoration, she said to herself, in the freshest and blithest content—

"It is a great improvement. How I wonder why I never should have thought of it till to-day! Won't Celia be pleased?"

As soon as the sun was high enough above the bog next morning, to shine in dewy effigy upon the rank and scattered blades of grass, Nora was out of doors giving the gaunt dogs a scamper. True her mind was burdened a little by the fear that she ought to seize every spare hour for study; but then with relief came the idea that she did not know what book it would be right to study on a Sunday, so she could spare just this one day—which "would be such a happy one!" Of course, if any one had chanced just then to ask her how the day was to be a happy one, she would have been more at a loss for an answer than it usually, under any circumstances, fell to her lot to be; but still, deep down below the fluttering resolutions of future study, lay, very firm indeed, the trust that this was to be an unusually happy day.

Yet, for all that, the day went on just like all other Sundays which the girl's memory held. There were the animals to visit in the misty fairness of the early morning; there was the old white cow to lead out of the sitting-room, to which she always wandered just at milking-time; there were the cats to feed upon the kitchen-hearth, with all the scraps of porridge Kitty would bestow; and then there was her usual journey to fetch her grandfather, while Kitty poured the stirabout into two saucers—a large one for Colonel St. George, and a small one for Nora—putting beside each a cup of skimmed milk. There was the same meal she had eaten hundreds of times before, there was just the usual jerkiness about the conversation, in consequence of her maintaining her part indefatigably, in defiance of her grandfather's morose silence, and then there were the usual question and answer with which they separated—

"May I drive you to church, grandpa?"

"And let Breen skulk about? Rubbish!"

It was all just the same, and still the girl fancied that this day was not to be like other days!

"Grandpa, do go to church a little earlier this morning," pleaded Nora, when he came out to her, as she stood in the open doorway looking wistfully across the bog, though the white-washed church at Kilver was not visible. "We are always so late; the service is half over."

"You've no cause to grumble about that," returned the old man, promptly. "We come out with the others, don't we?"

So it was a quarter past twelve—the service at Kilver began at twelve—when the old Colonel sent Nora round to the stable. She led Borak herself, though on the driver's seat of the car sat a diminutive old man, his hands completely hidden by the long sleeves of an old livery waistcoat dotted generously with rents and stains, and the whole of his shaggy head covered by a huge battered hat, the brim of which behind rested on his shoulders.

"Now, grandpa!" cried the girl, in her glad young tones; and then began the lengthy weekly process of packing the old man

into the car, and settling him there. "All right, Breen," she added, as she sprang up to her own side of the car after this tardy performance. But they had only just turned out of the weedy avenue, when Colonel St. George ordered Borak to be stopped, and sent Nora home for his umbrella. Considering what a pleasant morning it was, and what a disjointed machine was the one Traveere umbrella, Nora might have been excused for a little impatience over this interruption; but, in her utter happiness, there was no room for impatience, and she only laughed a little as she hurried back from the house and mounted to her seat again.

Late though it was when Borak stopped dejectedly before the church door, there was another lengthy process to be gone through before the old Colonel had sufficiently settled himself upon his feet to venture up the aisle on Nora's arm. The fact of the service being almost half over, signified nothing at all to him, and he evidenced that, beyond a doubt, by occasional ejaculations, as he settled himself in a corner of the large bare pew which belonged to Traveere.

"Eh," he questioned presently, in a sharp semi-whisper, "there's a stranger in the Penningtons' pew, isn't there? What's that? What's he say the text is? Pennington always mutters as if he'd a plum in his mouth."

"Oh, hush, grandpa!" was Nora's troubled whisper. "Every one can hear."

"Then why can't *you*, child, and answer at once, without such a bother? Is that Englishman here?"

"No, grandpa."

"Hem! Now sit still, and let's hear what Pennington makes of his sermon."

So at last Nora was allowed to be still and silent in her corner of the pew, though her mind could never be at ease in church, where her grandfather was always pettish and restless. Over the edge of the high pews, she could see Miss Foster's pretty bonnet, with its sprays of summer roses and its hanging cloud of snowy net; and there beside her sat Celia, her bright eyes looking straight before her decorously, only now and then conveying a swift and skilful hint to her brothers to be on their good behaviour. For Tom and Nat, though of course in a measure impressed by Miss Foster's proximity, were still so far lost to the fitness of things as to surreptitiously elevate their heads now and then, and execute a mild contortion of visage for Nora's benefit. But Nora, seeing at a glance how this distressed Celia, turned her eyes resolutely away from the Vicarage pew, and fixed them on the faded yellow banner at the far end of the church, in whose flimsy folds struggled an equestrian portrait of the great Orange King. But Nora found that after twelve years of constant study of it no new interest was possible, and as

there came into her beautiful eyes at last a dreamy look which was new to them, but which so comfortably convinced Miss Foster that the girl's thoughts were far away, that she took the opportunity for a steady and unhurried scrutiny of her face. What she really could see she never told; what she chose to see, she told again and again later that day, laughing at her own sharp remarks.

The heavy old iron plate went its round; the bare-footed and bare-headed peasantry grinned a little as they let it pass them; the few bonneted villagers laid down their coins cautiously; old Colonel St. George glanced with scorn at it, keeping his hands in his pockets, and grumbled audibly when Nora laid down the only pennies she possessed; and Miss Foster touched its rusty edge so shrinkingly with her primrose glove, that the plate dropped upon the floor, and her half-crown and the plebeian pennies went rolling into every corner of the pew.

Then Nora looked across and smiled—it came so naturally to her to smile when she met Celia's glance!—but she knew in a moment that she had done wrong, for Celia turned away her eyes without an answering smile.

The old car was at the church-door when Nora and her grandfather reached it, but Celia still lingered with Miss Foster in the Vicarage pew. The start with her grandfather, the shouting and shoving and inevitable search for his umbrella, were as familiar to Nora in every item as any of the tasks which, through all her life, had come back to her with every week; yet on this day it all seemed different. Tom and Nat never came out to see Borak, and excitedly to impart to Nora various items of news gathered since their last meeting, and with difficulty suppressed during service hours. As this had always happened before this day, on its sudden cessation, Nora found herself gazing rather blankly towards the open door, while Breen, with varied grunts and one or two encouraging shouts, assisted Borak to start by a good forward tug at his bit. But, when they had left the little white-washed church behind, and Borak was performing a slow march across the bog, all the girl's natural lightheartedness came back, and she even laughed at herself for that vague feeling of disappointment which she barely understood.

"Grandpa," she said, during one of Borak's voluntary pauses, while they sat awaiting his pleasure, "I wonder what an English Sunday is like."

There was no answer, but then the girl was accustomed to this reception of her remarks, and she knew that very few of them were worth repeating often enough to ensure some kind of reply.

"I daresay," she went on, cheerfully addressing herself, "that anybody who was used to tunes on the bells, and coloured windows, and beautiful Sunday dresses, would soon go back to England from here, wouldn't they?"

The questioning silence was broken only by Breen's appeals to Borak to "come out o' that," and Nora asserted the fact again, quietly to herself, without any interrogation at all now, even in the tone—"Yes, they would soon go back to England."

When, with a huge, final shake, the old car stopped at the door of Traveere, one consumptive axle-pin languidly gave way, and the venerable Colonel was deposited head-foremost in the hall of his ancestors.

"I suppose," said Nora, thoughtfully, as she assisted him to rise, and put his skinny fingers on her arm, "you've been in so many real battles, grandpa, that you'd be offended if I asked you whether this hurt."

"Bah! Don't forget my umbrella."

As she promised to remember, she led him to his bed-room, and up to the tall stool which stood before the iron safe. Of course he would spend his Sunday afternoon where he had always spent it; and the routine was only too familiar to the girl, and would have been pursued even unconsciously. Then, during the quiet afternoon hours, she sat in the kitchen reading to Kitty, who, in spite of having no back to her chair, and through all the thrilling interest of a detached chapter of "Up and Down the Ladder"—which Nora had selected from some loose leaves of old serials, in the conviction that it related to Jacob—slept serenely.

"I think," remarked Nora, lifting her eyes at last, "that you don't care about it very much, Kitty—nor do I. Jacob doesn't seem to come into it, nor any Bible people that I know. I think I'll go to sleep too, like you."

She leaned her head against the smoke-stained wall, and closed her eyes determinately; but, after she had, with strong resolution, kept her quivering eyelids together for the short space of half a minute, she sprang up with suspicious delight at hearing Kitty move, and helped her so briskly to prepare the meagre dinner, that Kitty gave it as her opinion that "jist a wink or two afore the fire alwis made any purrson else more brisksome than it did her."

The cold silent dinner was over, and still there were two good hours of daylight to come. Old Colonel St. George was nodding over the Enniskillen paper, his seat close to the small turf fire on which a black kettle was propped ready for his punch, while the whiskey-bottle stood near his elbow; and—what was there for Nora to do?

CHAPTER V.

Receive no satisfaction for premeditated impertinence; forget it, forgive it, but keep him inexorably at a distance who offered it. LAVATER.

"I CAN'T help it," whispered Nora, pushing her hair from her face, as she recalled how often her grandfather had been angry

with her for leaving the house on a Sunday, "I must have a run, and a breath of air; and so must you, Bran, poor old stifled fellow! Come—we *ought* to ask after Micky Corr."

Tying on her hat as she ran, and whistling to the lean old sheep-dog to follow her, she sped down the shadowy avenue, and out into the road. Of course she was out of breath—almost as much so as Bran himself—when she reached Rachel's cabin, but her greeting was as fresh and sweet as any western breeze that ever found its way across the bog from those laughing sun-kissed waves of the Atlantic. Micky had not left his room, and so Nora fancied *that* must be the reason Rachel came outside to meet her, and, for the first time within her memory, spoke to her nervously, and never even invited her into the cottage.

"Miss Nora," Rachel said presently, glancing over her shoulder at the closed door, "there's a gentleman here—I mean, there was a gentleman here yesterday—who's going to be good to Micky, if Shan doesn't make trouble about it. Micky says he's a friend of yours, Miss Nora."

"You mean Mr. Poynz, I daresay," observed Nora, sedately. "Yes," he is a friend of mine." And then her eyes, which were not under her control so much as she fancied they were, went a little wistfully to the cabin door.

"I don't know his name," said Rachel gently, "but somehow to day he got me, while we were by ourselves, to talk of a secret I've kept all your—a good many years; and I told him—there was something about him that tempted me on to tell him without thinking. And there—there was Shan, standing, outside the door, listening."

"Then I hope Mr. Poynz walked over him as he went out. It is so fearfully mean to listen outside a door, isn't it?"

"I don't mind how mean," said Rachel absently, "if Shan does nothing worse. But, if he heard, it has given him the power of doing mischief to us all."

"What was the secret?" inquired Nora, as if she suddenly remembered that she ought to ask the question, but failing to exhibit the slightest consciousness of what an awful and portentous thing a secret really was.

Rachel saw this at once. What experience had Miss Nora ever had to teach her how life could be overshadowed by the weight of a painful secret?

"Oh, it's nothing, Miss Nora dear," she said, speaking now in nervous haste. "Just a little matter about an old place I used to live at, that's all. I only mentioned it because I didn't ask you in. Shan's in a bad temper, and poor Micky in his bed; and—I thought you shouldn't waste your time, that's all. It's a nice evening, isn't it, miss?"

From Rachel's cottage, Nora crossed the road, and went into the bog. It was too soon to go home yet. She might as well

walk a mile across the bog, and then hurry to Traveere by the back way. So, chatting now and then to the old sheep-dog as he walked solemnly beside her, she went on at an uncertain pace, now and then taking a flying leap across one of the canals made by the cutting of the turf, and at last, after a rather wider leap than she expected, and a narrow escape from an ignominious descent into the brown water, mounting and seating herself snugly in a cutting of the turf. In entire oblivion of its new trimming, she threw the old brown hat behind her, and lifted her face to meet the pleasant evening breeze, which left her cheeks as softly and as daintily pink, as it left the line of western sky so high above the sunset.

"How often I used to fall in!" she mused to herself, looking reflectively down upon the watery bed she had so narrowly escaped. "And Will always said—" She had spoken half aloud, unconsciously, but, when somebody coughed at the farther corner of the cutting, she stopped spasmodically, and looked round.

"Oh, Mr. Poyuz," she said then, demurely, as she felt for her hat (keenly and pleasantly aware of its renovated appearance, though her eyes were far too busy to assist in the search for it), "have you been jumping?"

"Not yet," returned Mark, coming slowly forward, and dropping his cigar into the water at his feet. "Is it usual in Kilver to spend Sunday evening jumping?"

"I don't know why I asked that," said Nora, forgetting the hat again, and folding her hands in her lap. "I suppose I was surprised to see you, and hadn't made up anything ready to say."

A pause, and then Mark, seating himself upon the edge of the turf near her, inquired anxiously if she had made up anything ready to say now.

"No," she answered, shaking her head sadly, because her heart was bursting with questions which were not properly made up. "You weren't at church this morning."

"No, Miss St. George; I came out from Fintona only an hour ago. I expected to find Will Foster here."

"Did you?" she cried, in unfeigned gladness. "Oh, I shall be so glad to see him! He"—meditatively—"never fell into these pools, nor let his hat fall like mine did. He always said I went in for those that were too wide."

"Went—in—for," repeated Mark, slowly. "What does that mean?"

"Oh, I see!" she laughed, merrily. "It's Irish, I suppose, and you don't understand. It means if you try to do a thing and can't. I know, because Will always went in for the prize, and that meant he tried but couldn't get it."

"Oh, it's Irish, is it? I should have called it by a shorter name, Miss—Leonora. Have I hit your name rightly now?"

Miss Leonora! What a beautiful-sounding name! Per-

haps he knew some Leonoras in England—girls like Miss Foster, with smooth hair and hanging sleeves, and summer roses in their bonnets—girls who could sing and play, and quote poetry.

"Have I?" questioned Mark again, his glance shrewd and quizzical, as he turned to her. And she, with a daring merriment in her eyes—the eyes that were so truly Irish and so shy, while yet so fearless—kept her lips closed in gravity, but answered with a nod.

"But they call you *Nora* generally?"

"Yes; everybody calls me *Nora*," she assented, eagerly. "I like to be called *Nora*. It sounds so natural. The poor people, when they don't call me *Nora*, say *Miss St. George*—and that's dreadful, isn't it? Will said *Miss St. George* when he wanted to tease me. I never answered though. Yes, I like *Nora*," the girl added earnestly, as the weight of her nod grew into the weight of an uttered lie, "though it's as common as—as turf, Mr. Poynz; it is indeed. I always used to ask in every cabin if there was a *Nora*, and there always was; till at last I found a new family where there wasn't a single child or grown person called *Nora*, and I was coming away delighted to tell Will, when somebody called '*Nora*,' and out came a black cat. I left off asking then."

"Never mind. The cat was not called *Leonora*."

The girl's lips trembled for a moment, and it seemed as if his laughing glance brought two slow tears into her eyes.

"It wasn't true," she said, looking straight before her to the far horizon. "My name is only *Nora*—like that cat's. There's nothing English in it. I meant you to believe a story, and I should have let you believe it, only you didn't."

Mark did not answer this. He had taken off the old leather collar of the sheep-dog which lay at full length between them, and on the little brass medallion he was cutting something with his knife. Leaning forward cautiously, and rather ashamed of feeling cheerful again so soon—*Nora* tried to make out the letters.

"N-o-r-a-A-p-r-i-l-2-0-1-8-7-4."

"But, Mr. Poynz," she cried, her eyes very wide, "*Bran* is grandpa's dog."

"So I conclude, by his emaciated appearance. But this day is ours—mine to engrave, and yours to remember. Will you remember it?"

"I never forget anything," she said simply, "unless it is—Mr. Poynz, do you think a dictionary is easy to remember?"

"Very. How came you to be sitting here in the gloaming to-night?"

"I couldn't help it," she cried, her eyes growing timorous in their effort at defiance, now she was reminded of what she

had dared. "I was obliged to come. It had been so long——"

"I see," Mark returned, very quietly, as he slipped the worn collar over Bran's head.

"I'd better go now," she added, gently, as she put on her hat.

"But you've given me no message for Will."

"Oh, I forgot! Think of your seeing Will before I do! Please tell him I want him; and tell him that the old pine has fallen quite across the river now, and that I walked along it without my boots—my boots fell in, out of my hand, while I went looking for a trout. And tell him about Bran's collar—and how you——"

"I think," put in Mark, "if you tell him everything about yourself, he may be able to exist without knowing everything about me. You will be very glad to see him then?"

"Oh, so glad!" the girl answered, as she sprang lightly to the ground. "And I'm sure—I'm sure," she repeated, thoughtfully, as she linked her fingers in Bran's collar, and looked down to read again the letters there, "that Celia will be glad to see Will—Mr. Foster, I mean—than anybody else in the world."

"Celia will—not Rosalind?"

"Who is Rosalind?" asked Nora, simply. "Is that Miss Foster?"

"No."

"You know a great, great many girls, I suppose?"

"Hundreds of girls—but only one Rosalind."

"Is she exactly like Miss Foster?"

"No."

"Which do you like best?" asked Nora, looking up into his earnest face.

"I will tell you another day," he said, "when this bog has grown into an English wood, and I meet Rosalind there, with the sunshine on her lovely hair, and such a light within her eyes as I can only dream of now."

"She is beautiful, then?" asked Nora, rather wistfully.

"Very beautiful."

"And rich—and English—and educated," supplemented the girl, drawing those items of information from the recesses of her imagination. "Oh, how nice! Miss Foster would think her quite worth talking to, wouldn't she? I—I often think how lovely it would be if I were all that. Then I could do something, perhaps—something great, I mean, or good."

"My child," Mark said, gravely and gently, "will you remember just these few words—*Nobly borne is nobly done*? You say you remember everything, so I ask you to remember those."

"Listen! Oh, Nuel!"

The girl's exclamation told a little story of its own to Mr.

Poynz, but still he turned in the most leisurely manner to Dr. Armstrong, and then stood, with apparent unconsciousness, blocking the narrow way between him and Nora.

"Was Miss St. George sent from home in your charge?" Nuel Armstrong asked, his thin lips rather tight upon his teeth.

"May I inquire to whom you address that somewhat discourteous question, Dr. Armstrong?" asked Mark, with his cool, pleasant glance.

"To you," returned Nuel, his voice raised and quick. "To whom else? If I left the name out, that's your fault. How can we be sure how to address you?"

"As Mark Poynz—at present," the Englishman answered, in his clear quiet tones. "Now what have you to ask me, Dr. Armstrong?"

"Nora," called Dr. Armstrong, raising his voice still higher, "I am waiting for you."

"I am ready," she said, unconsciously clasping Bran's collar, as she gazed wistfully up into Mr Poynz's face. "I am—quite ready."

Seeing, in his shrewd, quick way, that she really wished to leave him there, he stepped out into the bog, and, as she passed him, offered her his hand. And then he bade good evening to Dr. Armstrong with a polite indifference, and, raising his hat, in answer to Nora's last glance—a glance full of timid questioning, and yet bright still with that indescribable fearlessness which belonged to her—he stood lazily against the cutting, and lighted a cigar, his eyes following the two figures until they melted gradually in the dusk, the girl's hand still clasping the collar of the old dog, as she kept him between herself and her companion.

"Was that priggish young Englishman trying to educate you, Nora?" inquired Dr. Armstrong, varying the question to which he had been unable to win any reply, and growing more harsh and eager with every effort to allure the girl from her proud and resolute silence.

"It seems," continued Nuel, having waited once more in vain, "that you are terribly in need of help from some one. Just think, Nora; he has told your grandfather that your ignorance is a disgrace to your parents, and that we ought to send you away to school—to England—at once."

"A disgrace!" echoed the girl, turning to him a grave and puzzled face, which was so lovely in the evening dusk that his jealousy needed no other spur.

"Those were his words, not mine, my love," he whispered. "I think you charming as you are. But he has poisoned your grandfather's mind. I found it out last night, only you escaped from me so suddenly I could not tell you. He says that you know no more than an English servant; that English ladies would

laugh at you, and that you ought to go to school, as if you were a child."

"Did he?" questioned Nora, in saddest surprise. "He doesn't look like—that."

"And he won his arrogant way too," continued Dr. Armstrong, his voice growing suave again. "You are to go to England. You are to go as an ignorant child, to learn what children of ten years old are expected to know."

"I don't want to learn—now," said Nora, hotly. "I'll ask grandpa to keep me here."

"But unfortunately," resumed Nuel, with a furtive, sidelong glance into the angry face, "your grandfather has decided. He says you will have to earn your livelihood presently, as many other girls do, and you must be fitted for it. Of course there is nothing we can say against that, as your future is in his hands; only I'm very sorry for you. So," he added, taking off his hat to wipe the drops from his brow, "you are to go like a child, as I said, in the charge of Miss Foster."

"Oh, no, no!" cried the girl, in a paroxysm of real fear. "Oh, Nuel, it would be so hard—so hard!"

"But presently," he urged, the cold tone assumed by an effort, "she will get used to you, and not treat you scornfully. I daresay she will quite like to have you with her, to show off the contrast between you and herself, and make Mr. Poyntz laugh over your funny little ideas. They are both very clever; and of course your ignorance will make them laugh sometimes—we can't help that. Besides, she will like him to notice how different your dresses are from hers, and your manners."

"Hush! Nuel," pleaded the girl. "I cannot bear it yet. If I am to go—with her, it will be so hard!"

"There is one other way, Nora," said Nuel Armstrong, speaking in suppressed excitement. "I will take you. Nora," he went on in her silence, roughly pushing the dog aside, and bending his face to hers, "I will leave my practice; I will leave everything, and everyone here, and devote myself to you. If you are in my care, you will have no hard words or chilling glances to fear. You will be safe and happy then my darling, with me."

"Go away, Nuel! Please go away!" she cried, tremulously. "I will not go at all—I cannot. You make it seem terrible. I shall stay with grandpa, and be ignorant."

"But unfortunately," said Dr. Armstrong, in that sharp and determined half-whisper of his, "everything is settled for you to go, and you have no power to decide otherwise. Only," he added, every word slow and distinct, "you shall not go to be made unhappy every hour of every day."

"Why am I to go?" she asked, pushing the hair from her temples, while her forehead grew puckered, and her eyes darker than ever in this new bewilderment. "Tell me again."

"Your grandfather says," replied Dr. Armstrong, laying one hand upon her shoulder so heavily that a little cry came from her lips, "that you have your livelihood to earn—as hundreds of other girls have had—and that no woman can do that unless she studies well. But, Nora," he added excitedly, "you need not listen to that reason. Your livelihood is earned for you. I have it waiting. I will make all this right with your grandfather, and you shall go to England with me."

"Stand away, Nuel!" said the girl, with a new authoritative tone in her clear young voice. "Come, Bran, let us hurry. How quickly it's growing dark! Walk over there, please, Nuel, as you walked before. So I am to go to England—ain I—and learn—to teach? Ah, what years and years it will take me! Good Bran! Tired are you? Never mind; we are close at home now."

Faint as the light was, Nora could still have seen the surprise in Nuel Armstrong's face, if it had not been that she never thought of looking at it. A strange quietness had fallen upon her, which baffled him more than any of her wilful moods had ever done; and until they entered the disorderly garden behind the house, he was silent in sheer astonishment. Then he felt he must seize the passing opportunity.

"Nora," he said, stopping her in the narrow path, "you had better think to-night of what I have said. You need not speak to your grandfather yet; only remember what I have told you."

"I remember," she said, her eyes dilating as she stood. "My ignorance is a disgrace to my dead parents. I know no more than an English servant; and English ladies would laugh at me. I remember! Who said that?—Mr. Poyntz?"

"Never mind it, Nora. Think of all I said to you afterwards."

"Nuel, are you quite sure that—he said it?"

"Would I invent such arrogant rubbish?" inquired Dr. Armstrong, his sharp and jealous tones growing almost fierce.

"Did he say it?" persisted the girl, her truthful eyes fixed steadily upon his face.

"Something very like it, if those were not exactly the words."

"I see," said Nora, gravely, as she walked on to the house. "He thought me ignorant—who could help it? He wishes me to learn—and I will try. But he did not say it as *you* say it, Nuel."

"I!" exclaimed her companion, excitedly. "I do not think you ignorant—I think you charming. I do not wish you to learn—I wish you to be happy and free from care. I would never have said such words. Listen only to *my* words, Nora, and you will be happy as the day is long. What has changed you this evening?"

"Nothing has changed me," said the girl, simply. "Only—though I have always known so well how ignorant I am, how

very, very ignorant—I have never been told so harshly as I have been told to-night."

"By that upstart Englishman? Oh, you will laugh to-morrow at having even noticed his words."

"I do not know what he said," she returned, gravely. "It is you who have told me the truth so plainly to-night."

Her hand was on the door as she ceased speaking, and, though he pleaded for another word, she quietly shook her head, and passed into the kitchen.

"If that be's yerself at last, Miss Nora," observed Kitty, taking up from the hearth a brown delf teapot with a broken spout, "I may just as well be car'n in the taypot. Ye'll get no scoulds to-night, fur yer grandpa's slep constant, 'cep whin I shookened him up an' couldn't wake him. Saints alive! is it starvin' y' are thin, me dear?"

"Rather," said Nora, as she stood shivering before the low turf fire; but, when Nuel Armstrong came up and gently attempted to take her hat, she turned from him, trembling with agitation, and threw her arms around the poor old Irishwoman's neck. "Oh, Kitty," she sobbed, low and brokenly, "I'm to go away, and I'm—I'm not fit to go! I don't know anything. I don't know anybody in England. And it's such a great lonely place! How can I go—how can I? If I could only stay with grandpa and you! I know you so well and you're used to me, and don't mind."

"Oh, England's all throughother!" observed Kitty, complacently, while she heavily stroked the girl's soft cheek with her horny fingers. "If it be's there ye're to go, me dear, you'll be no use afther, an' ye'll niver come back. Now thin, go an' power out the Docthor's tay. Why, if these tears continnies, we shall have ye cryin' all the night! Yit I've known ye go for years afore now 'thout crookenin' yer mouth. Fur shameful, Miss Nora!"

And this was Nora's comforter.

Late that night, after Dr. Armstrong had gone to his room—for he had told Kitty that he intended to sleep at Traveere that night, and her usual manoeuvres had been gone through to make him up a bed in the long dark spare room behind Nora's—Nora went quietly in the dark, and rapped at her grandfather's door. He had his candle burning, to her surprise, and he was sitting before his iron safe. But he closed its doors before he bade Nora enter, and turned to her with a little added sharpness in his querulous tones.

"What is it, child?"

"Only this, grandpa," she said, gently, as she stood beside him very calm now but so very earnest. "Am I really to go to England, as Nuel says?"

"Yes, child."

What was it, that sharp pang at her heart? Was it all pain, or was there a strange vague pleasure struggling there too?

"How, grandpa?"

"Never mind that. Leave it all to Nuel; he's a clever man—eh?"

"Yes, grandpa. And when am I to go?"

"When Nuel is ready. Will that do, child?"

"And why do I go, grandpa?"

"Your questions are the plague of my life, child! Be off to bed! How are you to get bread and cheese after I'm gone, if you don't earn it? And how are you to earn it unless somebody shows you the way? D'ye think," he added, raising his voice fretfully, "that I'm to saddle somebody else with a helpless girl, as I was saddled myself?"

"No," said Nora, very slowly, "that would not be fair. You are very just to me now, grandpa; but, oh, how I wish I had known this years and years ago!"

"How old are you?" questioned her grandfather, turning to her suddenly and sharply.

"Seventeen, grandpa."

"Seventeen? Hem! 'There's been a good deal of time wasted; but you must work all the harder for that. It's ruinous for a girl to grow up thinking she'll have nothing to do but spend money."

"I never thought that, grandpa. I knew how poor we were. Indeed, I thought you were even too poor to send me to school."

"So I am," rejoined the old man, with testy haste. "If I send you now, I shall have to scrape and starve and—— Make haste and get to bed, child. What are you waiting for?"

Her solitary candle had burned down to its socket when Nora reached her room again, but she hardly noticed it. The flame, brighter than usual in its last moment, gave its final convulsive leap, and died suddenly and utterly; but Nora went on undressing, as if accustomed to the darkness, and even when she was ready for bed, lingered at one unshaded window minute after minute.

"Miss Nora, is it fast asleep ye be's, me dear?"

"What is it, Kitty?" She had laid her hand on Kitty's shaking shoulder, before the old woman had turned her face from the direction of the bed. "What is it? I am here."

"Oh, Miss Nora—oh, me poor bairn, an' all yer parents dead! An' sorra a wan for ye to go to. Ah, it's fearsome to hear her the night."

"Who? Who, Kitty? Are you so terribly frightened? It's cold and lonely here, isn't it? But there's nothing to frighten you, Kitty."

"It's wurse it be's in there," whispered Kitty, pointing backwards. "Oh, Miss Nora, doaty, she's cryin' round ye the night! Ye mustn't go away from Owld Ireland, me dear. That's what she's manin'."

"What is it?" asked Nora. "Do you mean——"

"Yis, yis," cried the old woman, pressing her fingers to her ears; "don't ye be sayin' it."

"I'll come and listen. It's only the wind, Kitty, through those broken windows. Haven't I heard it in the daytime often? And really it does sound just like the banshee——"

"Whisht, me dear—whisht!" cried Kitty, in real terror. "If any purrison knows her voice, sure I ought, an' it's evil's comin'."

"I'll go and throw the windows open for a moment, you'll never be afraid again," said Nora, putting a shawl round the shivering old woman.

"Git ye into bed, Miss Nora," she whispered, glancing once more behind her, and then pushing the door as close as it would go. "It's goin' to lie by ye I be's the night through. An' if the darksomeness don't pass ye by unhurt, it sha'n't be owld Kitty's fault, me dear, afther sich a warnin'."

CHAPTER VI.

There are many ways of loving
I have learnt to know.

A. A. PROCTOR.

THE drawing-room at Kilver Vicarage had been brushed and decorated to look its best for this April Sunday, yet still it was but a faded, inartistic apartment; and Celia Pennington was becoming gradually convinced of this fact, for the first time in her life, as she sat there with Miss Foster, Blair's *Grave* open on her knee, but her eyes far more frequently fixed upon her companion than on the pages of the book.

And what wonder? Celia was used to Blair—constant Sunday afternoon study had familiarised her with his gloomiest lines—but no previous Sunday afternoon study had familiarised her with such a costume as Miss Foster wore, nor with such unconcealed indolence as that in which Miss Foster was indulging.

"I'm afraid you find it very dull here," she said, timidly breaking the silence, when she had been caught in one of her long gazes of mingled admiration and surprise.

"Country life always seems dull to me," admitted Miss Foster, smiling graciously, in acknowledgment of Celia's evident admiration. "Perhaps if I were used to it I should not mind."

"I wish I could think of anything nice to do," observed Celia, thoughtfully—"suitable for Sunday, I mean."

"I daresay there are but few entertainments which you would

think suitable for Sunday," returned Miss Foster, in her slow, sibilant tones, "and perhaps they would not entertain me. At what time do we dine to-day?"

"We *have* dined," replied Celia, with a vivid blush. "We dined as soon as we returned from afternoon service. Do you forget?"

"How stupid I am!" cried Miss Foster, with a laugh. "I had actually forgotten. I beg your pardon, Miss Pennington. I often get bored and forgetful in this dismal half-light. Are you not always glad to shut it out?"

"I can easily do that," said Celia, rising in her prompt, pleasant way. "I ought to have asked you; but I'm so used to talking with Nora in the twilight that I forgot. And we shall have tea directly now, Miss Foster. I think we are waiting because mamma fancied your brother would be here to join us. The boys are out looking if they can see him coming. And Mr. Poynz may come too."

"Perhaps—no, don't ring for lights for my sake, pray; I like to look out—perhaps he is with Mr. Pennington now."

"No, papa is alone in his study," returned Celia, stopping with her hand upon the bell, rather astonished by the sudden change in her guest. "He always stays there till we call him to tea; and mamma is reading to the children. Shall I not draw the blinds then?"

"No, don't trouble. That's the road from Fintona, is it? I thought so. Well, now let us have a little chat together, before Mr.—before Will comes."

Celia drew her low chintz-covered chair a little nearer to Miss Foster's, and smiled her readiness for the "little chat," though without a notion of how she ought to begin it.

"If Mr. Poynz should walk out from Fintona to-night, he would come here at once, I suppose?"

"Oh, surely!" returned Celia, with promptness. "As he knows no one but ourselves—I mean," she added, correcting herself with a blush, "he really knows only you and your brother, and he would come here to see you."

"Then why did he drive away yesterday with that girl in the car?"

Celia looked up, annoyed and mortified; but Miss Foster's smile was so affable, and the rich, long dress of chocolate and amber was so exquisitely made, that necessarily Miss Pennington's humiliation was short-lived. She even smiled, in her swift mental comparison of Miss Foster's dainty appearance with that dishevelled one of Nora on the day previous.

"It was very kind and polite of Mr. Poynz, wasn't it, to take Nora home? Poor Nora!"

"They didn't seem as if they had ever met before."

"Oh dear, no!"

Miss Genevieve Foster smiled again as she leaned back in her chair, twining her *châtelaine* round and round her long white fingers, and looking out upon the Fintona road.

"It seems very kind of you," she said, slowly, "to make a friend of such a curious looking girl as Miss—what do they call her?"

"Her name is Nora St. George," replied Celia, rather gravely; "we have known each other all our lives."

"I daresay," assented Genevieve. "Of course a clergyman's daughter is obliged to be friendly with her father's parishioners. I'm afraid I shall feel that a dreadful drawback to any pleasure I might otherwise have in a visit to my brother, in his new curacy."

"I like it," said Celia, with an involuntary sigh. And then, hearing the sigh, she blushed as brightly as if Miss Foster could have read its meaning as plainly as her own heart did.

"And was this—this Miss St. George at all intimate with my brother when he was here?" resumed Genevieve.

"Oh, very! And he always—— Look, Miss Foster, there he is! And the boys are with him!"

Celia had no eyes to look beyond, and wonder if Mr. Poynz had come too; nor did she think of glancing into her companion's face, to note either its pleasure or possible disappointment. She had no sooner recognised the three figures in the road, than she had left the room and was standing at the hall-door, smiling her welcome. But Miss Foster had not followed her, and, seeing this, a sudden sense of wrong-doing seized Celia, and she went quietly back to the drawing-room, her cheeks still pink, and her eyes bright, but her manners quite demure enough to give Will Foster legitimate cause for the hearty laugh which—as she was painfully aware—was irresistible to him when he witnessed this new primness in one of his old playfellows.

"Nothing further can have power to astonish me," he said; "unless Nature reserves such a possibility as Nora's receiving me with starched civility. Is she here to-day, Celia?"

Ever since she had escaped uncrushed from her brother's ready greeting, Miss Foster had been waiting to ask a question; but, after Celia's shake of the head, the question was voluntarily answered for her.

"Where's the Caliph?" Will Foster asked. "I hoped to find him here."

Celia's wide blue eyes went from one face to the other. Who could the Caliph be? But Genevieve answered rather more readily than was her wont.

"He said he should come out to-night to meet you, Will. He is staying in Fintona; and he knew you had promised to preach for a friend this afternoon, and so would not be here till night."

"Is it Mr. Poynz you mean?" inquired Nat Pennington,

pleasantly conscious now of the thorough identity of the Reverend Willoughby Foster with the Will Foster who had been such a jolly friend to him three years ago, and who had often said he liked his rapid brogue. "Because if it is we're not long after seeing him. It was towards Traveere he was going, round across the bog. He'd walked up from Fintona that way, without coming through Kilver at all. I knew him in a minute on the Bray; and then we waited, and he went straight on towards Traveere—towards the back of the house, I mean."

"Did he go in?"

To the best of Nat's recollection this was the first question which Miss Foster had directly addressed to him since her arrival at the Vicarage, and the tone of his answer therefore was not intended to be propitiatory.

"We didn't wait to see. We ran off to meet Will, and left Mr. Poyntz standing against a pile of turf in the distance—lighting a cigar, I think. He was not in any hurry to get anywhere; that was plain to see."

"I must certainly go and meet him," said Will, pondering, as they all stood near the unshuttered window; "and yet it won't be wise, for, if I find myself on the way to Traveere, I'm sure I shall never resist the temptation to go on."

"Colonel St. George must be a particularly attractive person," remarked Miss Foster, chillingly; but her brother's answer was only a laugh.

Celia was standing close to him, her face full of the brightest content—for she too had felt that their old companion was unchanged—but something in his laugh brought her eyes swiftly up to his face, with a new wonder in their gaze.

"You mean Nora," she said, the words forming themselves even more quickly than the wonder. "It would be Nora you would be obliged to go on to see."

"If I found myself on the way to Traveere, indeed it would!"

And then, just in the manner in which he might have paid her the finest compliment, he laid his hand on her shoulder, and told her she had not grown an inch since he saw her last.

"No, I'm very small," she sighed. "You always said I should be."

"All the better, Celia. A fellow-feeling will make you wondrous kind to me, won't it."

Of course there was no need for the blush with which this idea was received; but still it did no harm, for nobody saw it.

"There must be variety in the world, and length is sometimes inconvenient," Will said; and then he went away to disturb Mr. Pennington in his study, and to shorten abruptly the schoolroom lecture.

"I suppose he is just what you expected to find him Miss Pennington?" observed Will's sister in a new spirit of inquiry.

Celia nodded, with a smile. No thought arose in her mind that the short figure was a little stumpy, or that the pleasant manner were foppish, or that the dark closely-cropped head was deficient in any form or comeliness which belonged to the ideal of an English clergyman.

"Yes, he is just what I fancied," she said, presently, innocent of the fact that in reality sight had swallowed up such memories as Celia's unromantic nature had held as fancy. "How pleasant it is to see him here again!"

"Yet he wanted to go on at once and see—your friend. Did you not feel angry?"

"Oh! no. He *had* seen us; and he was always quite as fond of Nora. I'm afraid," she went on, presently, with another lingering glance at Miss Foster's silk skirts and glistening plats, "that after these years at home he will think Nora very—very unlike the ladies he is used to."

"Most probably; but why should you be *afraid* so? Why should he not see how much more educated and refined you are than she?"

In utter silence this remark was received, though Celia's heart began to flutter a little under a new vague sensation, the birth of a consciousness which could never die, though it was yet too weak and indefinite even for a name.

The Vicar had joined his lady-guest, and Will had merrily brought in Mrs. Pennington; yet Genevieve Foster still stood beside the window, and found no fault with the gloom; agreeing promptly to Mrs. Pennington's proposal that they should wait tea still a few minutes longer for Mr. Poynz. But the dusk had deepened into darkness, and the Vicarage tea was over, when at last he came in to them, in that cool and leisurely way of his which hid from superficial eyes the vigorous, intense, and ardent passions which his nature held.

Yes; no doubt the boys had seen him going to Traveere, he assented, when they questioned him; but still he did not go on to explain that he had not been to the house.

"Is Colonel St. George a very entertaining old gentleman?" inquired Miss Foster, innocently.

"Very," returned Mark, without joining in the general laugh. "He reminds me of that other entertaining gentleman who, cut off in his prime at eighty-nine, looked back upon his brief career of hoarding, and sighed to think what a fortune a man *might* save if he lived to the age of Methuselah."

"Did you see Nora?" inquired Mr. Foster, with the frankest eagerness.

"Yes. Miss Pennington, you were playing when I came in, were you not? The interruption is over now, and I wish you would *play* on."

"We always sing hymns on a Sunday night, Mr. Poynz," explained Celia, shyly; "will you join us?"

He looked over her music, and his rich and steady bass was just the support which the hymns had needed; so Celia played on delightedly. But Miss Foster, warbling from her easy-chair, looked unmistakably relieved when the singing was over.

"Now, Mrs. Pennington," she said, gaily, "make Mr. Poynz give us a vivid description of that dreadful old Irish ruin where the miser lives."

"If you think you could manage to wait till to-morrow, Miss Foster, I will go over there again and learn more."

Mark said it so courteously, and looked so really anxious to oblige her, that Genevieve could say nothing. Her lips tightened, but she relaxed them into a smile the next instant, and inclined her head with a graceful and indifferent intimation that she could wait.

Of course it struck no one as odd that Will Foster should insist on accompanying his friend part of the way back to Fintona; but it did strike Mr. Poynz himself as very odd that, so soon as ever they had passed the garden gate, Will should begin frankly to explain that he had a motive for this decision, in addition to his natural courtesy to his friend.

"All right," said Mark, slackening his speed at once. "There is no need to bring the motive all the way to Fintona. Speak out."

"You said you had been to Traveere to-day, did you not?"

"No."

"I thought——"

"Never mind thoughts, Will. Go on with your questions, just as if I *had* been to Traveere; I shall understand."

"No, you won't," asserted Will, gloomily, "if you have not seen Nora."

"I have seen Miss St. George. Go on."

"You have?" exclaimed Will, delighted. "I thought I heard you say so. Now tell me, honestly, Poynz, what you think of her."

"I have not had enough time yet," Mark answered, quietly, to think of her."

"I so value your opinion," Will went on, earnestly, "and I have so wondered what you would think of Nora."

"Why?"

"Why!" echoed Will, confusedly. "Don't you understand why, without my telling? I fancied you would, you are so keen. Tell me, Poynz, did you think her pretty?"

"I forget what I thought; but she *is* pretty."

"*Very* pretty?" questioned Will, excitedly.

"Yes, very pretty."

"And not—not awkward and unrefined?" There was only the faintest tone of questioning in young Foster's voice now, for

he had no difficulty in drawing on his memory for a confirmation here, and would not have needed it uttered by any, save this one friend of his, whose opinion he prized. "I remember there was never anything *gauche* or ungraceful about Nora. She might have been the highest lady in the land for her natural grace and refinement."

"Might have been?" echoed Mr. Poynz, in a tone of quiet amusement. "Beauty and grace and refinement pass for little. What is the missing link?"

"Well, you see, of course she is uneducated," responded Will, thoughtfully, "and her birth is—I don't know at all about that."

"I see. We must not call her the highest lady in the land by any means—yet."

"I don't think you quite understand me, Poynz," Will went on, anxiously. "I'm sure, if anyone ought to think little of education, it should be myself; I always hated it, and it never did me a grain of good. Still, I think, in justice to Nora, she ought to have the advantage of knowing what other girls are taught. And so——"

"Yes, and so?" questioned Mark, uncompromisingly.

"I mean," explained Will, boldly, "that I am bent on winning consent for her to come to England."

"As your pupil?"

"Really, Poynz," laughed Will, "that's too bad. You don't help a man a bit in what he has to say. Can't you guess how awkward it is for me—knowing you are sure to laugh at any thought of love—to explain to you what I feel about Nora?"

"Don't try it," observed Mark, coolly.

"But I must; for I want your opinion and advice."

"Whether I should laugh at *love*, as you just now observed," said Mark, "remains to be proved; but certainly my muscles cannot withstand the spectacle of a man *in love*. Had you not better go back, Will, and let me think over the situation against to-morrow?"

"Will you really? I shall be so much obliged to you, Poynz. You see it will be so hard to persuade old Colonel St. George to send Nora to England."

"That is all decided," returned Mark, as he stood and offered Will his hand. "Miss St. George is going to England almost directly. Her grandfather promised me it should be so."

"By Jo—I beg your pardon, Poynz, and forgot my cloth; but it does seem so extraordinary. The old Colonel is so thoroughly unget-at-able and mean, that I can scarcely believe, not only that he would consent, but even that you would venture to ask him about it."

"I ventured, and still live. Good night, Will."

"After all," mused Will, grasping nothing beyond his own sensations, "I don't know why she should be teased about

education at all ; a year or two will soon go, and then she will know all she needs. Of course I should like her to play and sing, and to be able to talk a little on every-day topics, but I don't care about much more. A clergyman's wife ought not to dance, and I never did find that classics added much to a person's happiness ; do you think they do ? ”

“ Robbed of the classics,” returned Mark, composedly, “ life would, in my opinion, be utterly barren of happiness.”

“ Of course,” continued Will, “ other things will come to her naturally, when she mixes in society. Why she has not even story-books to help her here—poor simple child ! ”

It was too dark for Will to see the cynical smile on Mark's lips as he answered serenely—

A simple child, dear brother Will,
You've chosen for your wife,
She reads no novels all the day ;
What should she know of life ?

“ I don't much mind that, after all,” returned Will, in his simple, practical way. “ It is not as if I were like you, Poynz ; I have only a chance, at best, of three or four hundred a year, unless some impossible old buffer is struck by one of my sermons, like the immortal man who sent a thousand-pound cheque to the Rector of St. Martin's, when he had chanced to call in and hear one of his. Now, if I were like you, I should——”

“ —not be going to make a proposal to Miss St. George,” put in Mark, lightly.

“ No,” laughed Will ; “ and what a blank that possibility seems to me now ! You wish me success, Poynz, don't you ? ”

“ With all—— Yes, I wish you success.”

“ I'm so glad you've seen her,” Will went on, all in the same tone of eager query, “ and that you admire her. I know you are very hard to please—indeed, that's why I was so afraid of telling you this. You are such a thorough bachelor, that I feared you would call me foolish for even thinking of marriage.”

“ So you are. It's all very well to ‘speak respectfully of married life,’ but every man should keep himself a bachelor.”

“ That would be hard,” said Will, gaily, “ to a man in love.”

“ A man in love is bewitched ; but then, if I remember aright,” continued Mark, lazily, “ a certain old philosopher has said that jealousy bewitches too. No other passion but those two, Will—love and jealousy.”

“ Has he ? Why speak of it so soberly, though ? You will come out early to-morrow, won't you, as we have to leave so soon ? By-the-way, there's a relation of Nora's lives at Fintona, on whom I ought to call—a very clever man.”

“ Such a very clever man,” assented Mark, coolly, “ that he

can possibly pursue his career without your assistance. A polished gentleman is Dr. Armstrong, Will."

"Oh, you know him!" said Foster, simply. "Yes, he has a smooth and polished sort of way about him, I always noticed."

"Byron, I remember, speaks of the smooth and gentle face of the most cruel man in the world's history."

"Does he? But I always liked Dr. Armstrong. Still I remember how, for fun, I used to try and make him jealous when I lived here. It was so comical to see him try to hide it, and to see Nora's perfect unconsciousness of such a thing. No wonder, was it, that I, as a lad, felt proud of exciting the jealousy of such a man?"

"Proud!" echoed Mr. Poyntz, with quiet contempt. And then he went on his way in the dark, repressing other words, glad afterwards that that bitter truth of Iago's, "Jealousy is the devil," had not passed his lips to Will while speaking of Dr. Armstrong. But never guessing then that he himself had greater cause to fear this man's jealousy, than had the hopeful young lover who was whistling cheerily now as he walked back to the Vicarage.

CHAPTER VII.

Who knows whither the clouds have fled?

In the unscarr'd heaven they leave no wake;

And the eyes forget the tears they have shed,

And the heart forgets its sorrow and ache.

LOWELL.

NORA came downstairs on Monday morning, without a trace of the restlessness and fear of the night before. Just for a few minutes—when Kitty's retreating footsteps had first awakened her in the dusk—she had sat up in bed wondering over some vague sensation of dismay; but soon remembrance had fully dawned, and she could even marvel over the old servant's past terror with regard to the banshee, and her own dread of leaving Traveere. The light-heartedness of hope and youth and perfect health could not desert her for long, and the sun had scarcely risen above the bog, when she was out among the gaunt old animals, chatting to them in her own peculiar way, half grave, half whimsical; while beneath all her caprice ran the old longing of her childhood—How beautiful life would be if the days could begin with a mother's kiss; if she could walk at her father's side in the dewy morning, or have a sister who would care to hear her thoughts, or a brother whose hand would lead and help her. The thought was an old one; yet it had power to bring tears even now, as she stood gazing wistfully into Borak's sedate face, or leaned her smooth cheek against Snow's well-

developed ribs. It was an old thought, but one which must be a sad one to the end.

She had given Bran his run, in the jagged avenue between the flax and potatoes, and was walking round to the kitchen-door (her fingers clasped in his old collar), when she saw Shan Corr's slouching figure in the open door-way, and heard his rough demand to see Dr. Armstrong. Then for the first time she remembered that Nuel had slept at Treveere, and was there now; but the swift, involuntary feeling of disappointment had not had time to define itself, when Shan's reiterated words hurried her on. He had not heard her step, and was noisily bidding Kitty tell the doctor he was there.

"'Toll him!" cried Kitty impatiently. "It'll be harrd to tell him afore I find him, 'less ye find him yerself, an' bring him here to be towld."

"I've jist got that to tell him that'll make him mad intirely, an', if ye want to keep yer place, ye owld jabberin'——"

"It's you who are jabbering, Shan," said Nora, in her clear unsuspicious tones. "I hope no one is ill at home?"

Corr pulled the brim of his old felt hat a little lower over his eyes, by way of a salute, gazing boldly into Nora's questioning eyes.

"No wan's sick," he owned sulkily; but it's the Docthor I be's here to see, Miss Nora."

"And so you shall," returned Nora, pleasantly. "I will go and tell him. How is Micky this morning?"

There was no answer; but Kitty, watching the two as they stood, saw an odd, dark colour rise to the young Irishman's cheeks, while his eyes still never moved from Nora's face. With the shrewdness of her countrywomen, Kitty drew her conclusions. Shan was too angry with his brother even to mention his name, and yet felt some shame of his own in meeting Nora's frank, kind glance.

"Well, what matter? Kitty thought. It was the Doctor Corr wanted, and the Doctor would be sure to keep everything right.

But Nora, guessing nothing of the abashment struggling with the evil in Shan's face, overlooked his silence, and went on to Dr. Armstrong's room. The door was wide open, and the room empty; but, as she came downstairs again, to seek him in the sitting-room, she heard his voice in her grandfather's bedroom at the back of the hall, and then, in quick retort, her grandfather's raised, querulous tones.

"Nuel!" she called, as loudly as she could. "Nuel!"

The voices ceased in a moment, and with a forced deliberation. Dr. Armstrong came from the room. But he could not prevent his steps hastening to her when he saw her on the stairs, her eyes bright, and her cheeks fresh and pink from her run.

"You are wanted," she said, moving backwards as he came towards her. "Make haste. You don't know how urgent the call may be. It is at the kitchen-door."

"It can wait. You have not said good morning to me, Nora."

"Yes I did—yesterday."

And in another moment she had sprung past him, taking five shallow stairs in one, and was standing in her grandfather's room, waiting for him, and discussing the prospects of the flax, in a learned and absorbed manner—so little did she know what she might have prevented, by only just those few words which were all Nuel Armstrong would have needed to keep him at her side.

Colonel St. George and Nora had finished breakfast, when at last Dr. Armstrong returned, calm and unruffled as ever. He had scarcely got half through his smoking stirabout, when Nora passed him on her way from the room.

"Wait a few minutes, Nora," he requested, in his cold, decisive tones; "I am going out with you."

"No," said the girl, shaking her head, "I do not invite you—in fact I don't want you."

"Frank, at any rate," he acknowledged, with that swift tightening of his lips which was the only betrayal of mortification ever visible in his smooth face; "but I choose to come, my dear."

"I shall run all the way, then," asserted Nora, composedly, "and hide safely in the wood before you come. Grandpa," she added, suddenly, "won't you come? I was just asking you when Nuel came in. Do, grandpa."

She had been tempted to the entreaty by an indefinable change which she had noticed in her grandfather that morning. Not a pleasant change, for he was even more gloomy and morose than usual, but a change which made her more gentle to him even than her wont. But this wistful invitation to the old man evidently angered Dr. Armstrong, and even before the old Colonel's curt and rough refusal, he had pushed his chair from the table.

"Your grandfather is not a boy to run about at your bidding, Nora," he said.

"No; but I will be a woman to walk about at his pleasure," she answered, prettily.

And then the doctor rose hurriedly from the table, and came up to her.

"I am coming," he said, in his rapid tones; "you shall be a woman indeed to-day, Nora, and see how a woman can be humoured and obeyed."

"I shall not go," said Nora, quietly, "unless—Won't you come, grandpa?" she asked once again, with a pleasing glance into the old man's rigid face.

"No child; go where you choose; but I want Armstrong at home."

"I shall follow you, then," said Nuel, as she passed him, "down to your old haunts by the river."

And then, without disputing the old Colonel's command to him, though he chafed against it, he took his seat again, and let Nora leave the room alone.

"Don't ye be goin' far, Miss Nora," pleaded Kitty, meeting her when she passed through the hall a few minutes later, with her hat and her dictionary in her hand. "an' don't be aftler stayin' long. It's down in the spurts I be's this day, an' I can't raise up, me dear. It's thin footstips in the night, I know."

"What steps?" laughed Nora. "The banshee's?"

"Hish, me dear! Don't ye be led furr to laugh at hurr. No, it wurr reel footstips goin' back an' foorth, an' back an' foorth, down here between--as furr as I could make it out, me dear--between yer grandpa's room an' the sittin'-room. Didn't I be hearin' it in the very middleness of the night? An' if it wurrn't yer grandpa's stips, why, thin it wurr--- Rin on, me dear," put in the old woman, hurriedly; "maybe I wurr dreamin'. Niver mind ould Kitty. Why, bliss me, you'll see the young gintleman from the Vic'rage, won't ye? He'll be cheerfuller thin the Docthor be's the day. He's donny sure, me dear, to lave that flavoursome porridge; an' he generallly so politeful."

Bran was blinking his weak eyes on the doorstep as Nora passed, and she looked down, hesitating for a moment. Then she smiled because her eyes had fallen upon the letters cut upon his collar, and with a touch upon his head she gave him leave to follow. Leaving the house, in the opposite direction from the bog, she walked across a few small subdivided fields, to reach the river, which was an old friend at whose side she loved to sit or wander. Slowly she followed it, until she had passed the insignificant coppice which was the only wood Travere boasted. Beyond it a fallen pine-tree lay across the river from bank to bank, and upon its jagged roots Nora ensconced herself with the deftness of an old *habituée*; while Bran, not quite tired enough for a nap just yet, sat with his chin resting on her knees, with blinking satisfaction, in the uncertain sunshine.

"Now I can study well," said Nora, opening her dictionary on her lap. "I won't waste a minute. If the nuts were ripe, it would be nice, wouldn't it, Bran? We could learn just as well eating nuts. Where did I leave off yesterday? 'Abhor, *v.*, to abominate.' There's a plover! I wonder how they spell peewit among themselves—not awkwardly, I fancy. 'Abhor, *v.*, to--- You silly old fellow to start! It's a real queen-wasp, and she only wanted to whisper to you, N-o-r-a—How quickly he cut it! And somehow" mused Nora, linking her fingers

again into the old dog's collar, "it makes things seem different—just as if Bran were my own, and so I had a friend who would never again belong to anyone else. 'Abhor——' Oh, I'm so glad to see that Mr. Elliot's cherry-tree blossoms thickly this year, because, you know, Bran, a cherry year is a merry year."

This explanation merged into a wider thought, and Nora was gazing down upon the water below her—seeing nothing of her dictionary now, seeing only vague wide pictures of that unknown country to which she was going—when two people, who had been seeking her in the little coppice, came from it into the sunshine close behind her.

She sat leaning against the upturned root, her hand still on the dog's head, her unheeded book still open, and her face beautiful in its thoughtfulness, as she gazed along the glistening water. And in the harmony of the spring morning the picture was beautiful beyond words. But Willoughby Foster did not wait to notice it; the graceful girlish form was Nora's, the face in all its present gravity was the piquant, winning face of his little playmate, and just then he had no thought beyond.

"Nora!" he cried—and the dim crowd of hopes and fears dissolved like spray at his call—"Are you not glad to see me, Nora?"

If anyone had asked Nora, three days earlier, how she should receive her old friend on his return to Ireland, she would not have hesitated to affirm that she should run to meet him as she used to do, and would have so many words to say in that first hour of reunion that it would seem only like a minute. Yet now, barely sixty seconds after his well-remembered voice had broken her vague dream of England, she was sitting back in her old place, laughing a little in gladness at seeing her old friend, but with a clear inquisitiveness in her eyes which in no way proved them blinded by the rapture of joy.

"Of course you guessed I should come here to find you at once," Will said. "Nora, isn't this like old times, only you are so—— Poynz, you ought to have told me."

"What ought Mr. Poynz to have told you?" asked Nora, as she gave Mark her hand, surprised a little because she saw that he must have sauntered from the coppice after Mr. Foster.

"He knows," laughed Will; and then a little suspicious silence fell among them, while Mr. Poynz settled himself on one of the strong roots above Nora, and while Mr. Foster lured Bran from his position, and appropriated the space he had occupied.

"Nora," said Will, enthusiastically, "do say something delightful."

"This is very pleasant," asserted Nora, with great soberness. "And you are really a clergyman now, Mr. Foster?"

"Curate of Heaton, in the county of Surrey."

"Do you like preaching?"

"Of course I do. What a pondering tone, Nora, and yet your eyes are laughing! Don't call me 'Mr. Foster,' please."

"Do a great many people go to hear you?"

"Pretty well."

"And do they like the sermons?"

"One question at a time is a marked improvement," put in Mr. Poynz, coolly, from his perch.

"Oh, I forgot!" cried Nora, raising her eyes to his, and quite unconscious how beautiful they were in their merry coyness. "I will not ask so many questions—if I can remember."

"It's my turn, isn't it?" continued Mark. "Is this the fallen tree on which you walked across the river?"

"Yes. I carried my boots in my hand, and, when I stopped to watch a trout come down, my boots fell. It was so curious to see how quickly they swam away out of sight, and yet how slowly the trout had come into sight."

"And you walked home without boots?"

"I tried, but couldn't manage it; and at last Micky came up, and fetched me a pair of his mother's."

"Rachel was always your best friend," said Will. "Do you remember how she used to give you gingerbread out of her shop, and hide you in a cupboard when Colonel St. George appeared; and how you repaid her by bursting out one day to say I was not there, when you heard Mr. Pennington accuse her of encouraging *me* too in idleness?"

"You were so very idle," observed Nora, reflectively, "that it seems quite curious to think of your sermons doing people good."

"Let us conclude they don't," observed Mark; "we shall start on a more comfortable understanding then."

"But really, Nora," laughed Will, with a little deprecating touch upon her hand, "I hope they do a little good; and they will do more—by-and-by. Don't you take the Caliph's jokes for earnest."

The Caliph!

Nora's eyes went from one face to the other. How she would like to ask whether Mr. Poynz was like that Caliph she had read of in Will's own copy of *The Arabian Nights*, when he had lent it to her long ago. But it would be a real question, and she had been already rebuked for questioning.

"Pondering again!" smiled Will. "Oh, when you go to England, Nora, you will soon find out why we call Poynz 'The Caliph.'"

"Miss St. George," put in Mark, lightly, "why are you not packing now for your English journey?"

"Michael Corr is in the wildest state of excitement about going," said Will, "yet his journey must necessarily be a good while hence. Poynz is actually going to take him into his service, Nora. Shan is enraged about it."

"I thought something must have angered Shan," returned Nora, recalling his visit to Traveere that morning. "But how good of you, Mr. Poynz, to help Micky! He will be a good servant, I think. And, if I chance to see him in England, it will be so pleasant."

"Chance to see him!" echoed Will, merrily. "I should rather think you would."

"But I am going to England to learn; I am to be a governess. Why do you laugh, Mr. Poynz? Of course I can be a governess, if I learn well."

"Of course you can—a model one. Only, when your pupils ask you if Leonora is the Irish for Nora, don't nod."

"No, I shall never do that again," she answered, emphatically; "never."

"Conscience did grow uncomfortable, then?"

"No; but it's no use doing that sort of thing if one must be found out all in a minute. Besides, I shall think about nothing but lessons. I have wasted quite enough time, and now I shall begin in earnest. What is the best thing to begin with, do you think, Mr. Poynz?"

"A dictionary," said Mark, with much evidence of having thought the matter well over; "and then a *Bradshaw*. Anyone who knows those two books straight through, is highly and perfectly educated."

"You will find everything that is necessary come quite readily to you, Nora," put in Will, laughing. "You will be with my mother, I hope and trust; and then, if you will let me mark out your day——"

"As thus," interposed Mr. Poynz, coolly: "A morning walk—with Will! a noonday ride—with Will; an afternoon drive—with Will; an evening chat—with Will; a moonlight stroll—with Will; a lamplight duet—with Will."

"I shouldn't mind so much," said Nora, with a lofty indifference to the last idea, "only that people know in a minute, when they talk to you, whether you are educated—don't they?"

"Young English ladies," said Mark, cheerfully, "rarely talk of anything except Algebra, and the use of the Globes."

"Then I should pretend not to hear."

"A very easy matter, too, for your face would tell no tales."

"Even if I started other subjects," mused Nora, "I suppose no one would care to follow?"

"That I would rather not answer for. Of course we all know the world was made for Caesar! but there are rumours that it was made for Titus too."

"Nora," said Will Foster, eagerly recalling her attention to himself, "I want to make an arrangement about your coming to England. When can I see Colonel St. George? We ought to leave to-morrow, and I cannot go unless one thing is settled"

"What is that?"

"You will soon guess."

"Mr. Foster," she said presently, wondering how it was that she had forgotten this eager expression on his face, and why Mr. Poynz laughed so much less, and yet had such a pleasant look of laughter in his long gray eyes, "your sister is not at all like you."

"Gena, you mean? No, she is not at all like me," Will answered, complacently. "Nor is Tory, my younger sister Gena is a very striking-looking girl, isn't she? And so *au fait* in things, and self-possessed. I shall tell Colonel St. George that it would be of the greatest advantage for you to take the journey to England with my sister."

"But it wouldn't," replied Nora, frankly. "I should hate it, and so would she. I—I would rather go even with Nuel."

"Is that the present plan for you, Miss St. George?" inquired Mark Poynz, his gaze intent and rather grave.

"Yes, I'm afraid so, but it's a secret, I think; you will not tell, will you?"

"I tell! On my honour I will be as secret as—you were?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Nora. "I really mean it. I think I ought not to have told, and—I don't think you will."

"Not he," asserted Will, with confidence. "He never tells anything."

"Don't you like talking, then, Mr. Poynz?" inquired Nora, anxiously.

"It depends," he answered, with his swift rare smile; and the soft colour rose in her cheeks without her knowing it. "But still I think," he continued, placidly, "that the finest speech a man ever made, was one of Charles Lamb's, where he only said *Gentlemen*, and left the rest to the imagination. But what were we speaking of? Have you chosen Doctor Armstrong's escort to England?"

"Chosen!" repeated Nora, dubiously. "Oh, no! Dr. Armstrong himself will be sure to decide all about my going."

"Unless Poynz chooses to arrange differently," interposed Will, experimentally.

"Why should Mr. Poynz arrange for me?" asked Nora, absently questioning Will.

"For a very good reason, if he will—because he has, like some man in a poem, the dash and the tact; the cunning to plan, and the spirit to act."

"And haven't you the—what is it?—the dash and the tact?" asked Nora, searching his face oddly.

"Well, not as the Caliph has, dear. I am content to take things easily. My motto is, 'To injure no one.' If I injure nobody, and consider everything that happens is best, that's enough, isn't it?"

"If you *make* the best of it, I suppose," replied Nora, readily.
 "What is your motto, Mr. Poynz?"

"I have none."

"The motto of the house is, 'Vigilance and Strength,' Nora," put in Will, laughing; "and he—— But I will leave you to find out for yourself how he employs it. *Now* don't you feel sure we shall gain our point, and take you back with us? Dr. Armstrong, of course, is a very good fellow—I always liked him, as you know—but we do not need his convoy."

"Miss St. George," said Mark, very gravely, as he roused himself from a long thought, "has Dr. Armstrong seen young Corr to-day?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes, quite alone, Mr. Poynz. Shan came for him this morning, and they must have been talking in the avenue for half an hour. I was afraid Micky was ill."

"Armstrong is a very old friend of yours, is he not?" pursued Mark, his strong, handsome face growing sterner as he spoke.

"I remember him all my life," replied Nora, wondering a little at Mr. Poynz's tone, "but I always think him more grandpa's friend than mine."

"He talks to you of everything, I suppose?"

"No," smiled Nora, a little wistfully; "I wish he would. He generally talks about—myself."

"Tell me one thing, will you?" said Mark, his tones stern now, as well as his face. "Does he ever speak to you of your parents?"

"Oh, never," returned Nora, without a moment's hesitation, "never! I used to ask him ceaselessly, because I always fancied he knew, but he never told me; and he said I ought never to ask, because it would vex grandpa, if he knew."

"I see," returned Mark, in his leisurely tones again. "Ah, yes—no doubt it would vex Colonel St. George! By all means spare them both."

CHAPTER VIII.

The worst is not,
 So long as we can say, "This is the worst."

SHAKESPEARE.

"MOTHER, mother, is it really crying that ye are? Tell me what's the matter, mother—ah, do!"

It was growing dark upon that Monday night, and Rachel Corr had not lighted the candle in the cottage kitchen, that her tears might not be seen by her sick step-son.

"Never mind, dear," she said, standing behind his chair while she pushed it near the fire.

But Michael's ears were quick, though he could not see ; and, taking one of Rachel's hands in his, he drew her gently to the low wooden stool where she so often sat knitting at his side.

"Mother, it isn't kase I'm goin'?" he asked, in his coaxing Irish tones. "For it's a long time that's away yet ; and," he added, wistfully, "ye said ye wurr glad to think I'll have a sarvice to go to when I'm a wee stronger."

"It isn't that," said Rachel, while the tears fell now without such stern restraint as she had kept upon them, before the low, one-windowed room had grown dark ; "it isn't that, Micky. It isn't anything about you, for I'm grateful in my heart to see you getting well, and to know that you'll have work to do that you'll like, and that will be light to you. No, I wouldn't shed a tear to-night about you, Micky."

"Then what is it, mother? Sure you'll tell me?"

The question was such a gentle whisper, and the lad's voice so soothing, that Rachel's long-guarded reserve broke down, and she spoke almost eagerly, in the relief of having such a sympathetic listener to whom to tell her apprehension.

"It's about Shan, Micky. It's that has made me so shaky and nervous to-day. He—he was listening yesterday evening to—something I said to the English gentleman who was here."

"Listenin', mother! And why wouldn't he listen?"

"I was telling about old Colonel St. George," continued Rachel, glancing, through the gloom, to the fast-closed cabin-door, "and I would rather anything in the world than that Shan should have heard."

"Why?"

"Because since then he's been to Dr. Armstrong to tell."

"Pr'aps," said Micky, soothingly, "Shan didn't even hear the laste bit of a wurd, and he'd never think to be tellin' Docthor Armstrong—sure he wouldn't, mother."

"It is the very first thing he would do," she whispered, with a fresh burst of tears.

"And would harrm come of it, mother?"

For a few minutes Rachel's quiet sobbing was his only answer, and then Micky repeated his question: "Would harrm come of it, mother?"

"Yes," she said, below her breath.

"To us, ye mane?" inquired Michael, wondering a good deal over his stepmother's manner.

"To us?" echoed Mrs. Corr, unsteadily. "No; not to us. You are going to England, and Shan will take care not to be a loser. I—I shall be turned from this cottage, Micky dear, at once. Yet that isn't the worst, because for Miss Nora it may be far more serious. I'm—I'm afraid of any power Dr. Armstrong may hold against the child."

"But it's very fond of her he is," Michael argued, his thoughts

hazy, "an' always goin' afther her. An' didn't ye joke once about Miss Nora marryin' Mr. Foster, an' the Docthor got real angry, an' said Miss Nora should marry no Englishman while *he* lived. Of course he won't do anythin' to hurrt her, mother, whin it's so much he thinks of her."

"But he could do it for other reasons than to hurt her," said Rachel, in deep thought. "What wouldn't he do, just to get her more into his power. And, besides that," she added, after a pause, "if he ever feels revengeful against her, he'd do it to—serve another purpose; and we know—at least I know—that he is jealous of her, even now she's only such a slip of a wilful girl."

"But it isn't a passionate, irritable man he is at all," said Michael, in his comforting tones.

"How are we to tell?" cried his stepmother, nervously. "He is too clever to show such feelings to *us*; but how do we know what he will do when he knows the secret of her birth?"

"Oh, is it that?" questioned Michael, a little enlightened at last. "Why shall you fret over that, mother? If *you* know things about Miss Nora, it can't be secrets they be."

"But it is a secret," said Rachel, very earnestly. "When I first brought her over here, a tiny baby in my arms, didn't the Colonel say that if I ever told who her parents had been, I should lose this cottage, and must find a home where I could."

"An' you told?" interrogated Micky, breathlessly.

"Yes, I told—I don't know why. I've thought it over all day long, and all last night, and I can't tell why it was. He led me on without my knowing it, I think. He must have done it very cleverly, but I don't know how. If he had asked me direct questions, I should have remembered myself, and been silent in time; but I'm sure he never did. He spoke with surprise of her bearing her grandfather's name, and somehow he led me on without my knowing it. Not that he could have really cared to hear, only he was talking about the house where I lived—the little picture there. You remember, Micky, that you said, on Saturday night, you were sure he had seen it before. Whether for that reason or not, it was so easy to talk to him about it; and when he asked—quite openly and coolly—why Miss Nora wasn't known by her own name, I never thought that when I answered him so naturally I was telling the secret I had kept for seventeen years, and—losing my home the while."

"Ye mean Mr. Poynz," put in Michael, quietly. "Oh, sure he'd never tell, mother, especially as he tempted ye to answer him."

"No, no," replied Rachel, eagerly, "he would not tell; but, Micky, the door was on the jar, and—and there stood Shan outside. I saw him when the English gentleman was going—we both saw him—and of course we both knew he'd heard; though

Mr. Poyntz just bid him good evening, as if he didn't think any thing about it. I thought the door was fast shut, Micky, and that you were safe in your own room; and—and—somehow I felt so at home with him while we talked, that I forgot all about being on my honour not to tell. And now no wonder I'm miserable, Micky."

"I don't think it's much cause ye have, mother," said the boy, gently. "Whatever it wurr, Shan can't be sure he hurrd right—not sure enough to tell Doctor Armstrong."

"Then why did he go off in such haste, and in such ill-temper, to see him this morning?" asked Rachel, hotly. "Didn't he go off the very moment he heard that the English gentleman had promised you work in England when you were able to go, and that you were to go at his expense? You saw quite plainly how angry your brother was; and didn't he go at once to Travere to catch the Doctor before he'd a chance of getting home again?"

"P'r'aps not," returned Micky, cheerily; "sure tellin' it wouldn't keep me here in Ireland, workin' with him? So why should Shan be botherin' in it?"

"But I know he would," whispered Rachel, her breath hurried and her lips dry. "He has no love for anyone. It wouldn't matter to him if I were turned out on the bog to-night, with no roof above me. And you, dear—why he'd rather see you here, even as you are, than see you go to England happy and well off. Besides, he'd fancy, too, that it would hurt the English gentleman I told it to, and surely you yourself saw on Saturday and yesterday that he'd a spite against *him*. No, don't ask me why, dear. How do I know? Sometimes I'm wicked enough to think he is savage against everyone who's far above him. Yes, I often think it, though I'm ashamed to do so—I can't help it—and sometimes I think he'd hate anyone he saw Miss Nora pleased with. He'd be savage with Doctor Armstrong, too, if it hadn't been that the Doctor got him off that trial. He can't forget that, for it was very clever of Doctor Armstrong, and the Doctor's friendly to him now; and—he'd be such a likely one for Shan to go and tell. Oh, Micky, Micky, if I had but been a wiser woman!"

"Mother," asked Micky, thoughtfully, "isn't Miss Nora the Cournel's grand daughter afther all?"

"Yes, yes," replied Rachel, hurriedly, rising as she spoke; "yes, Micky. How close this kitchen is, isn't it, dear? We'll have the door open again. I—I daresay I've frightened myself a good deal for nothing, haven't I? Most likely nobody heard at all, and I—I said nothing hardly. What day of the month is it, Micky?"

"The twenty-ninth," said Micky, looking anxiously after his step-mother. "Why?"

"Nothing—only I was wondering about the moon to-night. Strike a match and look at the almanac."

"I know 'thout lookin'," smiled Micky. "There's a full moon the night, mother."

"Yes, I see," said Rachel, peering now from the open cottage-door. "Then what time will it set to-night?"

"About half after four—that's of coorse to-morra mornin', mother."

"Yes, of coorse. It's very cloudy now, Micky, or the moon would light the bog beautifully, and we should see as far as Traveere. I—I wish Shan would come in."

CHAPTER IX.

Spaniel-like, the more she spurns my love the more it grows.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

ALMOST as rapidly as it had deepened in Rachel's low-roofed cabin, did the darkness deepen in the long, wainscoted sitting-room at Traveere; and, as old Colonel St. George sat rigidly amongst the shaggy dogs and dusty cats upon the hearth, his face seemed to darken from within with a gloom more ominous than the creeping obscurity of the night. He had roughly answered "No" when Nora had begged to light the candle in the sconce beside him; and now the girl stood leaning against the high chimney-piece, unwilling to leave him, yet unconsciously shrinking from his keen, suspicious glance.

For quite an hour—ever since Mr. Poynz had left Traveere, and that had been in the broad daylight—the old man had been evidently ill at ease, though he had maintained this attitude of unwonted stiffness: and Nora (whose presence he had not allowed until his interview with Mr. Poynz was over) wondered a good deal at his mood, as she stood looking down among the smouldering clods of turf. At last she made up her mind that he must be—what she could not remember his ever having been before—in bodily pain.

Standing against the cracked and darkening panes of the narrow window opposite the fire, Nuel Armstrong waited, as silent as was the old Colonel; but his eyes were fixed upon Nora, steadily and boldly, in the dim uncertain light.

"Grandpa," said the girl, trying to dispel the oppressive silence, "don't mind about Breen's worries. I suppose he has been teasing you again about the roof, has he?"

An impatient grunt was the Colonel's only reply, when, to Nora's relief, Kitty pushed open the leaning door, and brought in the usual family supper of bread and cheese, with an extra plate and knife for Dr. Armstrong. Under cover of the old

servant's presence, Nora lighted the candle, heaving an involuntary sigh of relief as its light struggled out beyond her; just as if she had known how furtively she had been watched in the gloom.

"Now, grandpa, come," she said, her cheerfulness an effort to her; but just then Kitty turned back in the open doorway to address her master.

"Breen would be knowin' 'bout the marnin', surr. Will he be prappin' the wall, annyhow? He's afther biddin' me ask ye."

"He will do nothing," returned Colonel St. George, sharply, as he left his chair and paced the room. "When I want him about the house, I shall tell him so. Push that door to."

It was with real longing that Nora looked after the old woman's retreating form. It would be so much pleasanter even on the smoky hearth of the draughty kitchen, with Kitty asleep in her broken chair, than here, where the air seemed heavy with fretfulness and discontent; yet still, with that innate compassion of a strong young nature for an old and feeble one, she came up to her grandfather, and linked her warm white hands about his arm.

"Take your supper, child," he said, standing suddenly to face her. "Don't let me be worried by any more of you—I've had enough. You've got to earn a living for yourself, and you cannot begin too soon to be a woman and earn it."

"No, grandpa, I am ready," she responded, gently. "I will do just as you wish—either go at once, or stay with you."

"Of course you will do as I wish," he retorted, briskly. "Who else is to have a wish in the matter, I should like to know? Who else has any call to have a wish in the matter? And yet they all interfere, as if—as if they knew better than I did. Pah!"

"And I am to go, grandpa?"

"You are to go, child; and you are to make no fuss about it either. They will put a means of living into your hands, and you must take it, for you will be poor enough."

His small dark eyes had fixed themselves on Dr. Armstrong's face now; but Dr. Armstrong noticed nothing of the gaze, as he came slowly forward, and stood at Nora's side.

"She shall never be poor while I live," he said, his tones very smooth and deliberate.

"Listen," cried the old man, with a swift, harsh laugh. "You shall never be poor as long as Nuel Armstrong lives. He will explain this presently, no doubt. He has always been your friend, child, and you hear that you are never to be poor while he lives. Don't let him forget."

"I shall not forget," observed Nuel, with emphasis, and as he said it he laid his hand caressingly upon the girl's shoulder.

Without shrinking, she lifted her own hand and pushed his away.

"I need never be poor, of course, when I can win my own livelihood," she said.

"Folly!" muttered Nuel, his face red and angry. "Do you think the world is made up of idiots, that a beautiful and sweet and spirited girl can go among them, winning *money* only?"

"Grandpa," said Nora, still close at his side, "won't you have some supper?"

"No; I've had supper enough. Now then, child, let me go. You can begin to prepare for your journey as soon as you like; and, if they, any of them, bring lies to you—plausible, ready-made lies—go to Nuel."

"Nuel may not be near," said Nora, trying to shake off her vague, intangible fear.

The old man's answer was sharp and sudden.

"Nuel *must* be near. If I thought they were to have it all their own way over there, you should stay here in spite of every Englishman under the sun. But you shall promise. You are an obedient child, and when you have promised you will keep your word. But that will do to-morrow; I'm sick of it all to-night. Everything that you need to hear I shall tell you myself to-morrow. Remember that, to-morrow morning, I've more to tell you than I ever told you in your life before. I wouldn't do it, only I know that what you promise me you will do. Now let me go."

"Grandpa, grandpa," she pleaded, wistfully, "don't let me go to England yet; let me wait till I understand it all better."

But the old man was gone before the words were all uttered, and it was Nuel Armstrong who came up to her eagerly to answer them.

"There is nothing to understand," he said. "I have made it all smooth for you now, my darling. You have only to trust everything to me. I will make the journey to England pleasant for you."

"Then I must go by land," put in Nora, carelessly.

"You shall have no anxiety, no care, no fatigue," he went on, without a pause. "I will spend my whole days in making life easy and happy for you, Nora."

"I should not care for such a life," she said, in proud unconcern. "I am no invalid to need a physician's attendance. Why should you want to give it to me, Nuel?"

"Why?" he echoed, his thin lips parting in a stiff, forced smile, while he moved backwards, and stood with folded arms against the closed door. "What other girl would ask such a question? My darling, how can ever I let you venture among strangers, knowing so little as you know?"

"I am not your daughter, Nuel," said the girl, gravely. "You need not feel ashamed about my ignorance."

"We are not thinking of the same kind of ignorance," he returned, still standing against the door opposite to her, his figure strained and stiff. "The ignorance *you* mean will soon be lost when you go out into the world, Nora. The ignorance *I* mean only I can take away, and I intend to begin to-night."

"It is rather late," she said, looking round with a sigh. "Will the lesson be long?"

"Nora," he asked, his voice a very whisper in its intense eagerness, "is it possible you do not guess enough to tell you what *is* the lesson I alone can teach you? Is it possible, my love?"

Even in the poor and meagre light of that one candle burning behind her, he could see a new look dawn in her face; a look which, though it did not show even a full comprehension, would yet—if he had not been so blind—have struck the death-blow to such a fancy as he was nursing—that the first fresh love of her womanhood would be his, at his own awakening touch.

"No person," she said, in her quaint, soft Irish way, "can be answerable for their guesses. Why, I guessed one night that you would cure Kitty all in a minute if I fetched you—and the next morning she was worse."

"Still you can guess this," he maintained, speaking sternly, as he tried to convince himself that there could not really be a gleam of amusement on her sweet, grave face. "You know all I have done for you, Nora; and you know how I require to be repaid."

"A few minutes ago you said I knew nothing."

"Nothing but what I have taught you," he answered, curbing his passion to speak quietly, as she did; "and surely after all these years I must have taught you how I love you."

"Just as grandpa has," she answered, looking frankly into his flushed face. "Let me pass now, please; I want to say good night to him."

"Tell me," he said, peering into her eyes as she came nearer to the door, "has any other man ever said a word to you of—marriage?"

"Of his own marriage, do you mean, or yours?"

"By heavens!" he cried, seizing both her hands, in his roused excitement, "you aggravate a man beyond endurance, Nora! Tell me the truth."

"I shall never tell you anything else," she answered, coldly.

"And you quite understand what we are to each other—you and I?"

"Quite," she said, calmly, as she drew her hands from Dr. Armstrong's; "old friends who disagree a great deal, but generally start fair again—you as the clever friend and physician, whom all my life I have been ordered to admire; I as the girl

whom no one but yourself has ever praised. I don't suppose we shall ever leave off disagreeing, Nuel."

"I have never dissented from you in my life," put in Nuel, hastily. "How could I, when I love you so passionately?"

"No; I don't think you have. Our arguments were always very tame. But I disagree with you a good deal, especially in every word you say about myself."

"Ah, Nora," whispered Dr. Armstrong, as he unfolded his arms and extended his hands towards her, "when others tell you of your beauty, you will feel how true my praise was."

"Others will never tell me. I am an uneducated, narrow-minded, dowdy person; and—and only kind people will even have patience to be with me and talk to me."

"Then I have great patience," laughed Nuel, putting one arm round the girl's waist, as he had been used fearlessly to do to the child he loved to pet; "and you like my patience, don't you, Nora?"

"No," she answered, gravely, as she moved from his reach; "I am very, very tired of it. You teach me nothing—you help me in nothing. Never once have you tried to show me how to be ready for the life before me. You tell me I am—pretty, and you tell me other things that are not true, and that would not make me better or more useful if they were true. You try to make me discontented with everyone except yourself; and so you tell me how *they* scorn me, while *you* will never change. If that is kindness, I should like unkindness and cruelty; and, if that is the way men love, I would rather no man ever loved me."

He was looking at her in blank astonishment, and the answer he would have liked to utter would not come to his lips. Beautiful as he had always known her to be, her beauty had never struck him as at that moment, and yet had never before seemed so far out of his reach. Yet even now her voice was stirred by no tone of passion. She was only very earnest in what she said, very simply and thoughtfully earnest.

"Nora," he cried, desperately and thoughtlessly, as he guarded the door a moment, so that she should not pass, "you mistake me to-night. You are not docile as you are sometimes. But I can wait. When you find yourself alone, my darling—alone among strangers—you will be glad to feel how safe you are in my love, and to know that we are destined for each other."

The girl's lips curled with frank disdain, yet still no glimpse of passion awoke in the lovely eyes, and Nuel Armstrong vaguely and uncomfortably felt conscious of this.

"That is a silly idea, which you know to be untrue," she said, quietly. "Is it that fancy which has made you so odd to me for the last two or three days? Grandpa never meant such a thing, I'm sure, Nuel," she went on simply, in his silence, "so

don't you fancy it. I will tell you now exactly what I'm going to do, and you'll see that I shall not have time to think of you. You remember what you told me last night, as we came home from the bog—I remember every word as distinctly as if you had said it only two minutes ago. You told me that the English gentleman had said it to grandpa, but I knew you had made a mistake: for one can generally judge if certain words could be uttered by certain persons, and I knew at once that Mr. Poyntz had not uttered *those*. He would be sorry I was not educated, not rude or scornful about it. He would be more likely to wish he could help me than to ridicule me—yes, I am quite sure of that, Nuel; and so the thoughts and words were yours. But, when I heard them—perhaps before I had thought enough to recognise that you were mistaken—I made a resolution for my life in England, and I will keep it with all my might and main. Why are you smiling? I am not such a child as you fancy; and you will see—whoever has thought me idle and rough and ignorant, shall see—that I can be just the opposite; and—But that is all I meant to say. With this work before me, and I so unequal to it now, have I time to think of unnecessary things?"

"Then promise me to think *only* of this, while we are apart, Nora—if we must be apart at all," Dr. Armstrong cried, relieved.

"Why promise?" she questioned, simply. "I shall be far too busy to waste a moment's time. Now, Nuel, will you pull the door, please? It has stuck, as usual. Oh, dear, dear, what a long time you and I have wasted here!"

"Must you go, Nora?" he pleaded. "Because, after to-night I can never feel sure——"

But by this time she had escaped, and was standing at her grandfather's bedroom door, far back in the dark hall. There came no answer to her summons, though she had heard the step within and the quick banging of the door of the small iron safe; so she just called her good night through the door, and went on to the kitchen.

While the supper was left untouched in the sitting-room, Kitty was taking hers gloomily beside the empty grate, her cotton apron pinned across her shoulders with an evident appreciation of its warmth and luxury.

"Not gone to bed, Kitty? Oh, that's good!" exclaimed Nora, as she stooped down upon the chilly hearth. "I want a turf or two. Grandpa's gone to bed, and my room will be so dismal to-night. Isn't it a cloudy night, Kitty? Now where are the matches?"

"A wee fire in yer room, eh?" queried the old woman, cleverly concealing the fact that she was grateful for this interruption of her solitude. "An' how 'll ye hide it from yer grandpa annyhow?"

"You'll see," returned Nora, loading herself briskly with turf and faggots. "I shall pass in the dark, you know. He couldn't see, even if he opened the door."

"An' the Docthor—he be's safe in his room, I s'pose, for he tould me he wurr stayin' here the night intirely. Stay—if he be's gone to his bed, I'll bring a lighted turrf from the sittin'-room, an' thin we'll have a fire in no time. Rin on, me dear."

Ten minutes after this, Nora had pinned the old curtains before her rattling windows, and drawn her big box and her one chair close up to the new-born fire, whose glow was at present wanting in intensity, and whose blaze was, to say the least, feeble.

"Isn't this delightful, Kitty?" she asked, seating herself upon the box, in utter unconsciousness of any self-denial in assigning the old woman the easier seat. "Isn't it far better than going to bed? How long can you stay with me, Kitty?"

"It ben't in the dark that I'll be in thim passages me lone agin," returned Kitty, decisively. "It isn't goin' to give her a chance o' skeerin' us agin the night, I'll be, less she comes here; an' they do say light skeers her."

"We've left her out in the cold," put in Nora, speaking cheerily, because she saw that the old servant's anxiety was real. "What do banshees wear, Kitty?"

"Whisht, Miss Nora! Niver ye spaak of her anny way. D'ye think the Docthor's gone to his room, me dear?"

"I would as soon talk of the banshees, Kitty, quite."

And then there was a few minutes' silence, as if Kitty's words had led Nora unwillingly into a new train of thought.

"I suppose," she said, presently, with that grave, questioning glance which was so childlike in its waiting earnestness, "that you have been in love, Kitty?"

"Jist a toime or two, me dear; sure that's all," acknowledged Kitty, briskly. "But I niver doide over it intirely, like the gurril in the pome ye read me; faith nor I didn't do worsely an' marry."

"Why not?"

"Why not?" repeated Kitty, placidly. "Kase on our widdin' day, me dear, he niver shoo'd himself at the churrch at all, an' I wint back to sarvice."

"Ah, he had deceived you at the very last?" questioned Nora, with acute sympathy. "How wicked!"

"Well, maybe it wurrrn't so much his fault annyway as it would ha' bin if he'd mint it," Kitty conceded. "He'd bin havin' toothache, off an' on constant, ye see, me dear; an' on the night afore that day—what would a bin his widdin' day if he'd bin marr'ed on it—he took suthin' a druggerist gave him t' easy him, an' he niver woke himself till evenin'. Dear, dear, how I

remimber seein' him rin up the Bray's face to till me how he'd slep' away his widdin' day!"

"And how did you meet him?"

"Nohow," was the quick retort. "D'ye think I'd ever agin think of a man ringin' me?"

"It was Breen, I think," hazarded Nora.

"Yis, it were Breen, me dear. Sorra a wan ilse. He'n me's bitter frinds now, though thin we'd a bin marr'ed to each anther, both of us."

"Kitty," inquired Nora, presently, "d'you think that when persons are fond of other persons there are different ways of telling them so, or only one? How," she went on, in her deep earnestness, "did Breen first tell you he was fond of you, Kitty?"

"Oh, jist in th' ould way, me dear!" replied Kitty, turning her head to see what pale, clear light came gliding from behind them. "He jist towld me I wurr purthy, an' kissed me; that's all they ginerally do, mirover, till they bring ye the ring to thry."

"Without you saying *anything*?" asked Nora, with not only astonishment, but real fear in her wide eyes. "Oh, Kitty, he'd *never* do that!"

"He did," asserted Kitty, simply; an' they be all the same. It be's the moon, eh? Thin the clouds are clearin' off at last, me dear. Are ye gettin' sleepiful?"

"But Nora only shook her head in answer to this question, feeling how very wide awake her eyes and her thoughts and her fancies were.

So, feeding the fire gingerly at intervals, though husbanding her scant resources of turf, and watching the unlatched door in a perfect tremor of fear whenever a tiny faggot crackled, the girl sat, hour after hour, wondering greatly at Kitty's power of succumbing to irregular slumber from which only the apparent dislocation of her neck at times released her.

And thus the night wore on, until the old woman's longest slumber of all was broken suddenly and terribly, and she started to her feet in the moonlight, with a frightened, wondering call upon Nora's name.

CHAPTER X.

Go, aim at idler hearts,
Thy skill is baffled here.

The Curse of Kehama.

MR. PENNINGTON had performed the usual duty of driving his guest to Lough Erne, and Miss Foster had uttered the usual remarks on Irish lakes in general compared with the English

cnes, and expressed the usual admiration for both, in a voice of calm indifference. And now, glad to feel that the duty drive was over and her box must be packed that night, she succumbed to an overpowering sensation of mental fatigue, and made Celia the recipient of many a languid sigh, as the two girls took their afternoon tea in the quiet Vicarage drawing room—Mrs. Pennington having given up her task of entertainment for a few minutes' rest before dinner. Celia, too, if she had not so conscientiously felt the responsibility of her position, would have been relieved by a few regretful sighs, as she compared this *tête-à-tête* with those afternoons which she and Nora used to spend over the fire in the shabby school-room at the back of the house. There was little need of the flaming bog-wood to make brightness there. There were no pauses in the gay discourse, and no dearth of glad spontaneous laughter. Even that frequent wrestling between Nora and the boys—which she used to quell in alarm lest the Vicar should send to silence them—and the damages she had to repair after their amateur cookery, seemed now things to be desired, from their fresh enjoyment and their freedom from all restraint. Had it ever happened that she and Nora, sitting together sipping their tea and fearing no interruption, had found the minutes drag, and subjects of conversation rare and uninteresting? Perhaps now Nora was out in one of their sunny haunts, longing for her, and never guessing—but perhaps (ah, Celia had never thought of that!) Will would have joined her there, just as in old times, and perhaps they would both be wishing she was with them, and thinking that *she* did not care at all.

A yawn, only half suppressed, from Miss Foster, recalled Celia to her duty in a moment.

"Would you like a book?" she asked, in the depressing tone of conscious inability. "Would you like to come to papa's study and choose?"

"No, thanks; I am too tired to read. Your roads are rather rough for driving, are they not?"

"I think they are," said Celia, meekly.

"I could have driven for hours longer in Hyde Park without feeling this fatigue. Let me see—you do not know London, do you?"

With a blush for her barbarous youth, Celia confessed that she did not know London.

"You must come over and visit us," said Miss Foster, languidly yielding her cup to Celia. "That will be a great enjoyment for you, and do you good."

Celia received this tempting proposal in silence. Of course it would be a gorgeous thing to drive in Hyde Park, and she should be sure to have new dresses to take; and Will was such an old friend; but the prospect had its drawbacks, and, besides that,

she knew very well that her parents would not consent to send her, and could not really afford to do so if they wished it. So she only smiled a vague little appreciative smile, and let the subject drop as inertly as most subjects dropped between these two.

"And yet," Celia sighed to herself, "it must be my fault, of course, because Miss Foster is so clever, and so used to clever society, and could, of course, talk so well, if she had any one worth talking to."

A pleasant interruption came at last, and Celia's first idea was that this was the very pleasantest interruption which could have come. Unheralded by the boys this time—for Nat and Tom were at a cricket-match in a neighbouring village,—Will came in, and roused them in his simple, cheery way; but after the first minutes, while the blush and smile with which she had met him still lingered on Celia's face, he went and stood at the window, looking out, his light words growing quieter and less frequent.

"How very anxiously you have hurried your return!" observed his sister presently. "How exceedingly desirous you have been to make yourself agreeable to Miss Pennington and myself!"

"Miss Pennington, have I been rude?" asked Will, in his frank, spontaneous way.

He was standing opposite to her, and had need only to turn his eyes from the gate to see her face full of pretty hasty dissent.

"I am so used to being here, you see, Genevieve," he explained to his sister, "that I fall quite naturally into all my old ways, and—Celia understands."

"When a gentleman is ungentlemanly," observed Miss Foster, looking steadily down upon her folded hands, "it is a pity that any one should *understand* him."

"I think," returned Will, "it is far more a pity to insinuate anything discourteous of Celia's kindness to me."

"If you were not thoroughly suspicious," said Miss Foster, coldly, "you would not say such a thing as that. But you always were suspicious, Will."

Before Will's second rebuke was uttered, Celia had quietly left the room, conscious that family bickerings should, if possible, be conducted privately. But, as far as Will was concerned, she need not have done so. He had no intention of quarrelling with his sister while they were both the guests of his old tutor; and, as soon as he was conscious that they two were left alone, he began to whistle softly as he stood looking out.

"You seem to be watching very anxiously," observed Genevieve presently. "I suppose you are in a hurry to go

back to—— What is the name of that Irish girl's shabby old home?"

"Traveere," replied Will, with placidity.

"I suppose you found the parting very hard to-day. Was the good-bye exquisitely pathetic?"

"I heard no good-bye," was Will's careless retort. "I shall see Nora again to-morrow, and, beyond that, I hope and trust she is coming to London with us."

"Coming with us!" cried Genevieve, raising her fair, arched eyebrows, and speaking with slow, amused contempt. "There will be more voices than one required to arrange such a ridiculous plan. Do you suppose I would travel with that semi-barbarous girl? If her relations want her conveyed to England, let them *pay* some one to see her safely there."

"Mother has given me permission to invite her," put in Will, his voice betraying all his own anxiety. "I telegraphed to mother, after you must have left home, and she answered most quickly and kindly. You have no idea, Genevieve, how anxious I am for poor little Nora to have care and teaching for a time."

"Oh yes, I have an idea!" returned Miss Foster, scoffingly. "I am not quite so dense as you hope. And as for mother, of course, if you took her unawares with a telegram, and put your story plausibly, she would do whatever you wished. You know how easily she is wound round anybody's finger."

"Hold hard, Genevieve!" put in Will, good-humouredly. "She *is* our mother, you know, however flexible."

"Remember, Willoughby," said his sister, with great emphasis, "if you utter a word of this absurd proposition before Mr. Poynz, I shall hold you up to the keenest ridicule."

Perhaps the threat was not so terrible as she imagined, for there was a smile on Will's face as it was uttered.

"And you know very well," she continued, "that, if I wrote to mother this morning, and asked her if she really meant what she telegraphed to you, she would say, 'Certainly not,' and that she left it all to me."

"Just possible," said Will, with a sigh; for he knew the weak points of his mother's nature as thoroughly as Genevieve did, though he far more thoroughly knew the good points.

Therefore the laugh was all gone when Celia came back, and she could plainly see what a relief her entrance was to him; while, in her innocent delight at seeing this, what wonder was it that the girl blushed in simple, frank confession of it, even though Miss Foster's eyes were on her?

"See," she said, as she came up to the window, unconscious of what a boon this new interruption was, "there is Mr. Poynz at the gate. I am glad," she added, simply, turning to Genevieve, as Will passed through the open window to meet Mark; "I am very glad he came this evening."

"Are you?" questioned Miss Foster, concealing her own joy with admirable address. "You see it is so natural to me to see Mr. Poynz dropping in at all hours for a little music with me, or a chat, that I never could be surprised—as I daresay you are."

By this time Will had hurried down the drive, and Mark, who was not hurrying by any means, had barely passed the gate when his friend's eager question met him—

"Well, Poynz?"

"I am glad it is *well*; I was rather doubtful about it myself."

"No, but really," persisted Will, eagerly, "what luck have you had? Will the old man listen to my proposal?"

"You will see when you make it."

"But you pleaded my cause for me?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Poynz—thank you so much."

Something in the tone made Mark turn to look, and his idea was at once confirmed by Will's rufescent face.

"Not in that way, Will," he said, quickly; "I have only urged the advisability of Miss St. George going to England with you and your sister, instead of with Dr. Armstrong. I am not such a fool as to plead another man's *love-suit*, remember that. I don't believe you would ask it of any man, but if you ever asked it of me, I should refuse without a moment's hesitation."

"Of course you would," returned Will, rather dejectedly. "I really did not expect it, Poynz. Is Nora alone with her grandfather at Traveere to-night?"

"No; Dr. Armstrong is there."

"You seem vexed about it," observed Will, astonished. "I should be sorry if she were alone."

"It is a trifling evil—to be alone," returned Mark, coolly. And by this time they had reached the window, and he was greeting Celia, as she held it open for them to enter the room that way.

The dinner at the Vicarage on that evening was rather a silent meal, though Miss Foster, sitting at Mark's side, brightened considerably on hearing that he had accepted Mrs. Pennington's offer of a room, and did not intend to leave Kilver again until he started for England the next day with herself and her brother. Celia smiled with pleasure too, and began to hope that Will might be inspired after dinner with a plan of entertainment which should make the evening cheerful. But Will's thoughts never touched any such diversion. Though uncharacteristically *distract* himself, he could yet be aware that something had occurred to produce a quieting effect upon his friend. Never a great talker, there was still about Mr. Poynz such a keen sense

of humour, such quick appreciativeness, and such ready sympathy and clearness of thought, that his presence relieved and brightened the most sombre table. Yet on this evening, though a stranger might have been deceived by his readiness and ease, Will was thoroughly aware that his silence was the silence not only of deep, but even of disturbed thought. And Will was yet wondering over this, when he and Mark and the Vicar followed the ladies to the drawing-room.

"As we have spent a whole day without you, Mr. Poynz," observed Miss Foster, "you must do your very best now to make up for it; mustn't he, Mr. Pennington?" she added, smiling at the Vicar, and thinking how very little tact he displayed to come and seat himself in the vacant chair beside her. "Will is very reprehensible," she continued, graciously ignoring any little difference of opinion she and her brother might entertain in private, "but he *did* give us a stray hour this afternoon."

"And wasn't of much account," put in Will, simply to make conversation. "Poynz, your society would have been the boon, you see."

"At a pinch," quoted Mark, composedly, "Lord Ballyraggan is better than no lord at all."

"I think you ought to put it, 'is better than any other lord,'" amended the Vicar, politely. "We sleepy aborigines, who do not know what society is doing, and scarcely see the *Times* till it is a week old, can be but dull entertainers. I'm sorry Miss Foster has not had better amusement to-day than we could give her. I trust you understand, Mr. Poynz, how glad we should have been to see you?"

"Your generous hospitality tempted me to take that for granted," returned Mark, pleasantly; "but to-day, as you see, I am but a moody companion."

"Moody!" echoed Will, in utter thoughtlessness. "I'm sure I saw no moodiness in you to-day, as we sat on that old pine-tree—you and I and Nora."

If, from a wide repertory of remarks, Will had sought for the one most calculated to annoy his sister, he could scarcely have succeeded better than in selecting this; yet he was as innocent of its unappositiveness as of its immediate effect, and went on looking over Celia's music, utterly unaware that his sister could hardly suppress her jealous feelings sufficiently to utter her next remark in the tone of light disdain which she desired.

"Nora," she repeated, turning to Celia with a smile. "Isn't that the girl you told me of, who runs wild about the country, and scarcely knows good from evil?"

"I—I think——" began Celia; but Will burst into the discussion—

"Nora is one of the best girls I know, Genevieve. However

she may have been trained, she is as good a girl at heart as ever lived."

"I did not ask you," smiled Genevieve. "As I happen to have heard a good many stories of your pranks here, and of the similar tastes of this Irish girl, you cannot, of course, expect me to be much impressed by *your* view of the matter."

"She never did a thing that was wrong," Will went on, with boyish vehemence; but Mark interrupted him with a quiet remark to Genevieve.

"His evidence is nothing, is it, Miss Foster? They were confederates, and I dare say he felt his own inferiority too; for aren't we told that women in mischief are wiser than men?"

"She was a very small woman," said Will, laughing now.

"As a child," observed the Vicar, "such conduct was excusable in one who never was trained with any care or experience; but Nora is growing up now, and I should like to see a little more staidness and circumspection."

"I suppose," remarked Miss Foster, with a smile for Mr. Poynz, as he sat down near her, "that this girl found some way of amusing you this morning? You are such a student of character."

"Am I? Then I must go again, to improve my opportunities—especially with her grandfather."

"He's a very wicked old man, I've heard," said Genevieve, more cheerful now she had won Mark's entire attention. "Tell me—does he look as curious for a man as his grand-daughter does for a girl?"

"Well, that would be saying a great deal—wouldn't it? But still he *has* a curious appearance.

'Sometimes he wears an old brown coat,
Sometimes a pompadore;
Sometimes 'tis buttoned up behind,
And sometimes down before.'

"He is a fright of course!" laughed Genevieve.

But Will, asleep to the hint so skilfully prepared for him, put in his interruption.

"But surely, Poynz, you don't deny that Nora is very beautiful? Why, I never was so astonished in my life as when I first saw her to-day, yet I always fancied I knew how pretty she would be."

"As none of us," returned Mark, perfectly aware in what mood Miss Foster awaited his reply, "have had your opportunities, Will—excepting, of course, Miss Pennington,—you must not expect us to see things exactly as you do. I will either politely adopt your opinion of Miss St. George's beauty, or be silent about it—whichever you like."

"I think," put in Mrs. Pennington, with a deprecating glance

at Miss Foster, as if begging pardon for continuing a rather derogatory subject of discussion, "that, in censuring Nora St. George's unconventional demeanour and behaviour, we must make a little allowance for her own utter ignorance, both as to her past and her probable future."

"Mamma always thinks there's some mystery attached to Nora," smiled Celia, glancing up at Mr. Poynz, as he came to ask her for a song. "Isn't it a romantic idea Mr. Poynz?"

"Very, and a fatiguing one. The solution of a mystery necessitates thought, and thought militates against a man's happiness. Do sing, Miss Pennington."

Celia sang then and there; passing from "Susan's Story" to "Walter's Wooing," and then to "Janet's Choice," with an evident appreciation of variety. And after that Miss Foster sang, with a little persuasion. And then she performed various accompaniments for her brother, failing in her attempt to play for Mark too, as he had challenged the Vicar to a game of chess; while Celia presided busily at the tea-table, and Mrs. Pennington surreptitiously over her "company" knitting.

At last the music and the game and the chat ceased. The evening—though they had made it an unusually long one—was over, and even the Vicar (always the last in the house to retire) had closed his bed-room door upon the outer world.

It was Celia's bed-room which had been given up to Mr. Poynz, and it was crowded with traces of her occupation—in feebly and vividly executed illuminations, in unsubstantial adornments of white muslin, and in prettily-bound volumes of moral poetry—yet Mark barely glanced at its attractions. Slowly and thoughtfully he paced backwards and forwards through the length of the narrow room, seeing nothing of the rose-covered drugget at which he gazed, and hearing nothing of his own measured steps. When the moon shone from behind its veil of drifting clouds, the light roused him and took him to the window, to stand looking out upon the chill brown bog, with its glistening strips of water, and upon the silvered laurels below him; but when the jealous clouds shut in the moon's light again, he turned and renewed his walk, still deep in harassed thought. Once, in a sudden fit of impatience with himself, he drew one of Celia's school prizes from a little cord-suspended shelf, and sitting down beside the candle, with his fingers in his thick silvered hair, gave himself up to its study. But its ethics were not all-absorbing, and after half an hour's effort, he closed it quietly, and for the last time resumed his thoughtful walk.

Presently he paused, listening in astonishment; for the silence of the night was broken by a step upon the gravel under his window—a light, running step.

Thoroughly aware that the scene without was all in darkness,

Mark extinguished his candles with the cool promptitude of a man of action; and then he pulled aside his curtains, and opened the window. The sound of the step had ceased; but just then the hall-bell was rung in a swift, unsteady manner.

"What is it?" called Mark, without a moment's hesitation. But, just as he spoke, a little rift in the passing cloud-bank gave the full moon a moment's time to light the scene, and then he needed no reply to his question.

He knew the girlish form he saw leaning against the door, bareheaded, and panting a little; he knew the beautiful face, raised eagerly and piteously at the sound of his voice; and a minute afterwards he had opened the Vicarage door upon Nora St. George.

CHAPTER XI.

"Open the door!"

No; let the curtain fall.

The Inn Album.

"It is help we want, Mr. Poynz," panted Nora, her face full of fear as she spoke fast and quietly, "at home, please. The house has fallen."

"Not yet," said Mark, taking down in his own the trembling hand that still rested on the bell, and seeing at a glance how alarm had magnified what must have occurred at Traveere. "*Something* has fallen, I daresay; so we will go and see what it is."

"Oh! Mr. Poynz," she cried, her eyes tearless and terrified under her drawn brows, "it grandpa's room; and—— Do come!"

Mark smiled a little on hearing how low and wistful the pretty Irish voice could be, even in all its alarm; but the smile was visible only for an instant, and Nora never saw it. Besides, there had not been an instant's delay, and Mark wasted no time in either words or thoughts.

"I will harness Mr. Pennington's pony," he said; "and he or I will drive you back. We shall be at Traveere in a few minutes."

"You will come—you will really help us?" she questioned, with one piteous glance into his face; and reading there his answer, without a word she turned to run back to Traveere, swiftly as a frightened child.

Mark looked after her for a moment, and then looked up at the window, where the Vicar's head appeared with a query as to what was the matter.

"Something has happened at Traveere; Miss St. George has been here for help. May I harness your pony and drive after her? or may I harness it for you, Mr. Pennington?"

The Vicar's prompt response was to throw the stable-keys at Mark's feet.

"I will dress at once," he said; "but don't wait for me. I will tell Will, if he is aroused. Pray drive on as fast as you can, and pick up Nora—poor little girl! We will follow."

There was little need to tell Mark to drive fast. Just as quickly as he had drawn the phaeton from the little coach-house—remembering well that it was there he had seen Nora first—and just as quickly as he had harnessed the stout gray pony he took him now through the garden gate, and out into the bog-road. What a pity Will had not awakened soon enough to come at once! But Mr. Pennington would soon follow, and in the meantime *his* hands were strong, and Nora in her haste and weariness might fall. The stout gray pony, with an evident inclination to resent this derangement of his usual night's rest, had it in his mind to repay his persecutor by a sturdy rebellion; but his attempts were summarily cut short, and, with a spasm of pain and humiliation, he was obliged to dash up the incline, conscious that the new hand upon his reins was that of a master.

Mark, bending his head against the wind as it came sweeping down the bog, allowed no pause; for he knew that at any moment the clouds might once more imprison the friendly moon, and hide from him that slight, dark figure hurrying far in advance. He called to her again and again, loudly, in the night silence, but she made no pause, until at her very side Mark drew up the panting pony. Then she stopped, her right hand pressed upon her heart, and her breath coming quickly and irregularly. She moved to the side of the carriage, and grasped it with one hand; and Mr. Poynz, without reminding her that she would have lost no time by waiting for him to drive her, lifted her in, and left her quietly to rest, while he hastened the injured pony on again, swift and direct almost as the night wind which met them.

Did either of the two who sat now so silently side by side, recall in their thoughts that other drive along this road, only two days ago, when—though sitting so unsociably back to back—they had frankly and merrily chatted to each other, just as if a life-long friendship were beginning for them then? And did either of them wonder whether, that being their first drive, this might be their last? Who could tell, for they were both as silent as the moon above them, through all that drive across the bog.

Once or twice Nora looked up into her companion's face, her lips parting as if she would have spoken had her breath been less hurried; but she never did, and Mark never turned at all to her until they had passed through the gate at Traveere—left wide open—and entered the short, neglected avenue. Then he turned, and for an instant closed his hand upon hers.

"The old house stands where it did, my child," he said, letting

"he pony walk up the rough, grass-grown road. "Take heart, and tell me what has happened."

"It was grandpa's room," whispered Nora, breathlessly. "There was a terrible crash; and—I ran to grandpa, and—his room was full of bricks, and mortar, and dust. And the bed was beyond, and even at the door I could scarcely breathe, and—oh, poor grandpa! And then I wanted—some one to help us, and—I came."

The moon shone from behind a young ash straight before them, and made a wondrous picture of the moving leaves and boughs. Mark's eyes were fixed upon it, and Nora's followed them, still with a great perplexity within their depths.

"I didn't stop to think whether it was wrong to run away," she went on, presently. "I felt all in a moment how helpless we were; and Kitty was asleep, and I knew you were all kind at the Vicarage; so I ran. I never stopped, never once, till you saw me; and I should have run back, only—you took me up. I wish I could have helped leaving—grandpa."

"You did the very wisest thing you could have done," said Mark, without the slightest evidence of being moved by her distress, simply in his own natural quiet tones. "A man's strength will be wanted—perhaps the strength of many men—and you and your servant could have done nothing alone."

"Alone!" repeated Nora, absently. "We were not alone. Dr. Armstrong is at Traveere."

"Is he?" questioned Mark; and now he turned his head and looked at her as he spoke. "Did you forget that, when you ran to us?"

"At first—at the very first I did," she answered slowly, her eyes dark and wide and puzzled. "He does not often stay with us, and I had forgotten. I soon remembered, though—quite soon—but I did not turn back; I went on."

"I am aware," said Mark, quite lightly, that you came on." But he could not hide something in his voice which told that he understood more than her words.

There was not another moment's loitering, and among the dreary shadows round the gaunt old house the pony was made to take them so swiftly, that it was a great shock to him to be pulled up again so soon.

The disjointed door stood open, and in a farther corner of the dismal hall Bran stood howling drearily.

"Why did you start, Miss St. George?" inquired Mark, in a comfortable, unconcerned tone, as they entered the house. "You surely understand enough about dogs to know that they make that hideous sound very often on a moonlight night?"

"No," said the girl, gravely, her eyes fixed straight before her in the gloom, "not that sound, Mr. Poynz; I have never heard

Bran wail like that. There—where he stands—is "grandpa's door."

It was opened as she spoke, and they saw that a light burned within; but Nuel Armstrong, who had come from it, pulled to the door behind him, and only the moonlight showed them to each other.

"What does this mean?" asked Dr. Armstrong, roughly addressing Mark. "What right have *you* in this house at this hour?"

"I have come to offer help," Mark answered, speaking very quietly as he looked down into Nora's white face. "I think that gives me right to enter where help is needed."

"Who told you help was needed?"

"I did," said Nora, steadily. "I went to the Vicarage, Nuel, and asked Mr. Poyntz to come and help us. Oh, Nuel, let me pass to grandpa!"

"You shall go where you will when this interloper has left the house," returned Nuel, making a futile attempt to regain his usual tone and manner. "So it will be wise of you to say good night to him and let him go."

"Miss St. George has not attempted yet to detain me," observed Mark, coolly, "so your advice to her is superfluous. I hope she will bid us both good night, for you and I can do all there is to do. Allow me to pass."

"Oh, certainly!" replied Dr. Armstrong, hissing the words suavely. "I shall be most happy. I only wait just to hear—a mere formula of course—by what *right* you intrude here."

"Stand back, sir, if you please," said Mark, with dangerous quietness. "I will waste no minutes in words with you—even in Miss St. George's presence. I am as near a connection of Colonel St. George's as you are—nearer, I will swear—and you shall keep no one from that room where the old man needs help."

Perhaps because he saw he had to deal with a strong and resolute man, and perhaps because Nora herself seemed shrinking from him while he stood in her way, Nuel Armstrong moved aside.

"You shall repent this unauthorised intrusion," he said to Mark; and Mr. Poyntz answered that it was very possible, and pushed open the door with a gentle hand, to look into the ruined chamber.

Before them, where they stood, a bank of bricks and mortar, and fragments of wood and stone, was piled so high that nothing but the bare curtainless upper frame of the bed beyond was visible.

Mark's keen, quick eye took in all the scene. The fragments of the chimney were heaped so high against the wall upon the hearth that only the top of Colonel St. George's iron safe was

left to mark his favourite corner; and on the hearth itself the mass reached nearly to a hole in the ceiling, which revealed another opening in the room above, and let in the moonlight from the sky itself."

"Does he live?" asked Mark, in low, quick tones, as he turned to Dr. Armstrong. You have been in. Does he live?"

"The dust was suffocating," was the answer, uttered unwillingly. "It drove me back whenever I tried to reach him."

"It is suffocating now," Mark said, impatiently. "Miss St. George, go quickly to your own room, and rest. We will send to call you—presently. Go in—it is stifling here."

He spoke in a tone of authority which seemed natural to him; but she only saw that his glance was very kind and anxious, and that he was in haste to do something which her presence hindered; so she turned at once, like a child, at his bidding, and left the room.

Bran was still whining dismally in the shadow; but, when Nora went up to him, and, kneeling beside him, in her loneliness, threw her arms round his neck, and whispered to him, coaxing, tender, pitiful, wasted words, he grew quiet; catching his breath just once, as if in a sob, and then standing quite still, with panting breast, and wide hollow eyes fixed upon the moonlight through the open outer hall-door.

"Bran," whispered Nora, stroking his old brass collar gently with her fingers, "isn't it lonely? Oh, Bran, isn't it lonely!"

It seemed a relief to whisper it even to the dumb animal who stood so still to listen.

"Miss Nora, it be's yerself at last, thin! Come, me dear, I've git a fire for ye, an' a cup o' tay. Come doaty."

It was no wonder—when the girl had held out so long! She was little more than a child, after all, and so little used to care and gentleness that she laid her head upon the old woman's shoulder, and sobbed away a little of the fear and loneliness and horror which had enfolded her that dreary night. And yet it was so strange to see her cry, even in her trouble, or seek and need a comforter, that Kitty could not think, in her astonishment, of words which would soothe and comfort. But suddenly she remembered, with satisfaction, that fire and candles were living facts, and would be better than any uttered solace, and that tea was a more efficacious sustenance than the wisest proverb.

So she led Nora out of the chill and gloom, up to the freshly-lighted fire in the kitchen, and something in its broad frank blaze made the girl shiver even in its warmth. Was the restraining hand helpless now? Was the master, who had made proflusion and ease and luxury impossible in this house, master no longer even in name? Was his will set aside now by his old servant, because he could not lift his voice to enforce it?

"Oh! Kitty," she cried, with a frightened sob, "is grandpa safe? Will they be in time?"

Kitty, standing beside the table to pour out the cup of tea, glanced sideways at her young mistress, startled by her cry. Was it possible that Miss Nora could be anything but *glad* to be released from the hard and grinding tyranny which had given her such a childhood and girlhood as only her own bright unsuspecting nature had rendered endurable? No, it never could be possible—so the old woman decided within herself, and brought the tea up to Nora with an unmoved face.

"It's about yer grandpa we'll be seein' afther a wee," she said, soothingly. "Now it's the cup o' tay ye'er to be dhrinkin'. Ah, this be's a bad day fur Traveere—glory to God. And th' ould master on'y stood his chance jist as the rist of us do. Ye don't be sayin, much, me dear, but I'll untherstand, mirover. Didn't I know suthin' wus comin' with her keenin' round th' ould house? An' this very night didn't I have a smell o' the black airth? But niver mind, doaty; dhrink yer tay now, and ould Kitty'll not lave ye, anny way. Wouldn't it be lavin' the heartt out o' me brist intirely?"

"Do have some tea yourself, Kitty," requested Nora, speaking absently, while she listened to the sounds from the room behind.

"Yis, yis, I'll sup it, me dear, prisently; but I'd like to be tould why that fool o' the wurld don't come. Wurrn't it meself jist after rinnin' fur him, the big idget?"

"Breen?" asked Nora, restless and feverish. "Oh! Kitty, nobody comes. If we could but help! Listen!"

"Bliss me, Miss Nora," cried Kitty, pettish in her fear, "how ye startle a purrson! I'll be so narvous prisently, I won't be ould Kitty at all. It's the clargy's voice, an' the young gintleman as come back to ould Ireland yisterdy; I should tell a bead fur a every hair o' their blissed heads the night. Yit, more's the pity, doaty, the praste himself can't hilp a sowl fryin' in Purgory, glory to God, till ——"

"Kitty! Kitty!" cried Nora, stopping the old woman's words in a perfect agony. "Oh! hush! hush! It is so terrible to hear to-night!"

Kitty would have relapsed into silence then, but Nora roused her imploringly.

"Oh! Kitty, won't you go? You haven't been forbidden, as I have, and they—I mean, Dr. Armstrong may want you. Call me, Kitty, the moment they allow you, for I *must* speak to grandpa."

"If it be's yerself that yer grandpa wants, me dear, I shall call ye swift, so rist aisy," returned the old woman, pausing, after she had risen, to look down with real curiosity on the girl. "It be's harrd to see, tho' why ye would care fur him as has niver chirished even so much as the purthy face of ye, me dear, an' wus as harrd

to me as to you, if not a bit aisier even, kase I wurr niver his slave, an' it's yerself that often wurr. But mebbe the fright has shooen'd ye. Ye'll be all right i' the murrnin', me dear, an' I shall make a pitaty cake that'll warm the cockles o' yer hearrt; an' sure whin I do that same, an' git the dacent bit an' sup, we'll git no scowls an' scouldin's now, as we've iver an' alwis got mirover. Whisht! What be's the matter? It's yerself that must sit quietesome, or I don't stirr."

"I am quite quiet," said Nora, standing with her hands locked. Call me quickly, Kitty, if you may."

"An' who be's to orther me, thin?" demanded Kitty, in soliloquy, as she left the kitchen. "Is there slave-grinderers all the worrld over, sure?"

Only a few minutes had passed since Kitty's departure, but Nora felt as if she had been an hour alone, when Dr. Armstrong came in to her.

"Nora, my dear," he said, as he took her hand and placed it on his arm, "I felt you would be anxious, and I am come to relieve you. We have carried your grandfather to the empty room on the other side of the hall—where you used to persist in sitting whenever I particularly wanted you out of doors, do you remember, my darling? He is rescued from all that wreck and dust! but we have not complained of the labour. Will you go in?"

She had taken her hand from his directly, and now her fingers touched for a moment the head of the old dog, who was following her from the kitchen. Bran understood the sign, and walked back to the hearth, with one low, long howl, which made Dr. Armstrong mutter an imprecation on his head.

"Will he know me?" asked Nora, turning to address Nuel for the first time, as she stood at the door of the room to which he had followed her.

"Know you!" echoed Dr. Armstrong, astonished. "Didn't you understand me, my love? He was dead when I went in this morning—at the first alarm. He must have been smothered in a minute."

"Oh, grandpa!" cried the girl, as she fell on her knees beside the improvised bed on which he lay. "Oh, poor, poor, grandpa!"

It was all that it seemed possible to her to say, in her great awe and bewilderment; in this her first experience of death—and a death which brought no anguish, even no great distress.

So she knelt, whispering in this strange compassion, while Nuel Armstrong, with low, endearing words, tried to tempt her from the spot. She took no heed at all of his presence. She was thinking of the awful suddenness of her grandfather's death, and wondering, wondering—while her eyes were dry and miserable, and her heart felt like a stone in her bosom.

"Oh, grandpa, not to have known that this was coming! Only

to feel it when it was too late to escape! Oh, poor, poor, grandpa!"

"Come away, my darling," whispered Nuel, taking her hand to lift her to her feet. But she quietly drew her hand away, and laid it caressingly on the shrivelled fingers before her.

"Grandpa," she whispered, tenderly, "no one shall take me away."

"I shall feel it my duty to take you away, Nora," said Dr. Armstrong, in his cold, smooth tones. "I will not have your health injured through any false sentiment. What did that old man ever do for you, that you should forfeit even one single hour's rest or happiness for him? Those who really love you are left to you; and while I live you never shall be lonely or sorrowful, my darling."

He saw that she had her hands pressed tightly to her ears while he spoke, and an angry, passionate light came into his eyes.

"Nora," he said, lifting her to her feet, "if only as your physician and your—present guardian, I forbid this motiveless conduct. Come away with me. I want you safe away. I want you safe in your own room, before they all come to—to disturb you."

"You will leave me here, Nuel, please," she said, as she brought a broken chair from one corner of the room, and took her seat on it beside the bed.

He saw that, gentle as the words were, they were very firm, and that she was not to be tempted. So, when he had lingered in vain for another word, or a glance, he left the room, that he might, if possible, prevent anyone else entering.

But apparently he could not do so. Both Mr. Pennington and Mr. Foster came in very soon, to urge Nora to go with them at once to the Vicarage, as Traveere was not a fit home for her just then, they said.

"As long as grandpa stays," she said, quite simply and quietly, "I shall stay. It is our home."

They pleaded long and earnestly, using every argument they could think of, but all to no purpose. She and Kitty would keep on this side of the house. The fallen chimney and broken roof were quite far enough away. Kitty would not go away, and she and Kitty were used to being together.

"You are very kind," she concluded, in those low, wooing accents of hers, "but I shall stay with grandpa."

"I think, perhaps," remarked the Vicar to Mr. Poyntz, as he prepared to set out for home, "if Foster will drive with me and bring back my wife, she will be able to influence Nora. This resolution is unaccountable. The old man has been a gruff old tyrant. Heaven forgive me! I forgot that moment that I was speaking of the dead. Poor little girl, it is a sad experience for her; not so much in what she loses as in what she learns. I

shall soon be here again to try once more to persuade her, if my wife's remonstrances fail. Is Breen about, Will, to put in the pony?"

"I'll do it, sir," said Will, as promptly as if they two were tutor and pupil still.

And then Mark, for the first time, went into the room where Nora sat beside the dead.

"There can have been no suffering, Miss St. George," he said, in his quiet way, glancing from the rigid face upon the mattress to the beautiful living one so near it.

"But no warning!" she whispered, in the same low intense tones. "Oh, poor, poor, grandpa!"

"Do you like to stay beside him?" inquired Mark, gently.

"Yes."

"Who would you like to have with you?"

She looked up into his face, almost with eagerness, to answer "Celia;" and he nodded with a smile.

"I suppose you know," he went on, after a few moments' pause, "who was your grandfather's lawyer? There is a Mr. Doyle, an attorney in Fintona. He came out to Traveere sometimes on business, did he not?"

"Yes," said Nora, considering; "not very often, Mr. Poynz; but he came sometimes. And—yes, it was always on business."

"I thought so; I am going now to fetch him. Not a long good-by," he added, with a smile, seeing a shadow fall upon her face when he offered her his hand. "I shall perhaps come back with Doyle, and certainly I shall stay in Ireland over—at present, at any rate. But still we can shake hands this morning, can we not?"

It was her first smile since they had parted on the day before, but neither of them knew this; and, while she was even unconscious of its being there, he only grieved that its very traces were so swiftly gone.

The Vicar had acceded readily to Mark's suggestion that he should send his daughter to Traveere with Will at once, and they two drove away at a pace which—but for that new experience of his in the moonlight three hours ago—the stout gray pony would have considered an infringement on his prerogatives, but which, while the memory of that drive still rankled in his mind, seemed merely a lively pleasant pace, to which an advancing prospect of breakfast lent a charm.

And now Nuel Armstrong had watched Mr. Poynz depart, and had taken up his own station in the room where Nora sat, in that wondering regret of hers, hardly comprehending what bewildered her, or for what she mourned.

But Mark had not started yet. Passing through the kitchen, because he knew that from the back of the house he could strike across the bog more directly for Fintona, he bethought him to

question Kitty and old Breen, as they stood together talking at the fire, turning their backs upon the weak and chilly light of dawn creeping into the house. It would be wise for him, before he sought the Fintona attorney, to be, if possible, quite sure that he was the man who would, if anyone, understand the affairs of Colonel St. George.

Kitty could give Mr. Poynz little information beyond the fact that though Mr. Doyle had come occasionally to Traveere, he "iver an' alwis refused the bit and sup." But Breen remembered hearing "him an' th'ould masther talkin' wan day behint him an' Borak 'bout signin' a paper."

That was enough for Mark to hear; and after a little chat with the old servants—or rather listening a few minutes to their volubility—he went out into the faint, gray dawn.

He need not have turned a corner of the house at all, on his direct way to Fintona, and at the moment it would have puzzled him to give a motive for doing so. But afterwards he knew that, slight as the sound had been, his quick ears had detected it even before he was conscious of doing so. The first window round the corner of the house was that of the room where Colonel St. George had slept, and to this window Mark went at once. Half-way up it was blocked by the fallen bricks; but it had been opened as wide as it would go, and Mark saw that a man could, if he were very cautious, enter the room that way. But he saw more. Kneeling on the *débris*, and engrossed in his labours, a young man—whose figure even thus Mark recognised in a moment—was clearing with his hands, quickly and cautiously, the rubbish from before the iron safe; and though perhaps it was done as quietly as possible, it was still done with an inevitable clatter. Between his teeth Mark saw that he held a key, as he worked on swiftly and eagerly.

It took Mr. Poynz but a few seconds to regain the hall, and turn the key which was in the outer lock of the door of the destroyed room; and then, before Shan Corr had time to do more than to look round from his height to recognise the English gentleman, that English gentleman had his fingers firm in the Irishman's collar, and had quietly swung him round, to find his feet, if he could, upon a lower level.

The sound of Shan's raised voice brought Dr. Armstrong out into the hall, and just then Mark found himself watching the physician's face very curiously. Could it be that he was so familiar with this Irishman's rascality that no new phase of it could surprise him? Or was he too self-contained a man, or practised a physician, to betray any feeling at all, except when jealousy was aroused? That he could betray it *then*, Mark had already proved.

"As temporary guardian of Miss St. George's interests—you styled yourself so to me an hour ago, Dr. Armstrong,—let me

recommend you to guard Colonel St. George's effects from thieves and vagabonds. Is this Colonel St. George's key? That scoundrel dropped it from his mouth in his fear."

"Yes, that is Colonel St. George's key," replied Dr. Armstrong, without looking *beyond* the key.

"Then you will doubtless have this window blocked at once, and, as this door locks—you told me that no other did,—you will decide, I feel sure, to leave the key here, and lock and seal the door until Mr. Doyle's arrival. Is that what you intend?" inquired Mark, coolly, as young Corr, muttering angrily, shuffled across the hall to the front door.

"As you like," returned Nuel, icily. "What was Corr doing?"

"Oh, worshipping, of course," answered Mark, with the keenest irony, "on his knees before the shrine. You seemed to know it all by instinct—or by previous knowledge of your man—else I would have told you in his presence. He has a spiritual countenance, has he not?"

"He is a man," remarked Dr. Armstrong, pointedly, "whose retaliation would know no limits of law, or pity, if you injured him without cause."

"Yes, he looks a vindictive vagabond," rejoined Mark, coolly. "Now, shall we help Breen? And then you will seal the door, with my assistance. I had hoped to be half-way to Fintona by this time."

"Do you drive?" inquired Dr. Armstrong, as he did what Mr. Poyuz proposed; or rather assisted him while he took the lead.

"No; I shall walk. I shall still be there unusually early for business, and the walk will be pleasant. I have horses for my own use in Fintona, so I can quickly drive Mr. Doyle out here."

Dr. Armstrong did his part carefully, feeling how keen were the eyes that watched him, and how dexterous the hands that helped. And then Mark Poyuz walked away from the old house, slowly and thoughtfully in the whitening dawn.

CHAPTER XII.

'Tis strange, . . .
And scarcely less than pitiful.

WORDSWORTH.

THE inquest was over; the anticipated verdict of "Accidental Death" had been returned; and for the first time within five-and-thirty years, the old brick grave of the St. Georges was opened; while, in true Irish fashion, the people crowded into the Kilver churchyard, to see the husband—called off so suddenly in his grim old age—laid beside the young wife who had *begun* to die upon her wedding-day.

The inevitable ceremony was over, and only compassion for the orphan girl had prevented its being a very hollow and indifferent one. But sympathy for her, while she stood beside her grandfather's grave—puzzled still, but so lone and solitary—had given warmth and feeling to the dreary proceedings; and now all those who, an hour before, had stood with her at the open grave, had met in the chill and gloomy sitting-room at Traveere; rather amused in their own minds, most of them, to think what a farce it was to wait for a will where there was only penury to inherit.

Celia Pennington sat beside Nora on the hearth—where the cats and dogs lay just as of old—and Doctor Armstrong stood beside her, with one hand on the back of her chair. She wore an old-fashioned black calico dress, which she had kept in her box for years, because she had thought it so very ugly. But what other mourning was in her power, when she had not even one shilling in the world? Celia was dressed prettily as usual, in a thin, puce-coloured dress, which stood her in the stead of mourning, and which she had decorated funereally—as she gave Nora to understand—with jaunty bows of black ribbon. Celia was not afraid of the house, now that the rooms were occupied only by living beings; and she did not intend that nightfall should part her and Nora, as it had done ever since that terrible night when the roof had fallen in.

At the table, near Nora, sat Will Foster, employing the interval of leisure in studying a *Bradshaw* which was open before him. He had arrived from England only on the previous night, having been obliged to escort his sister home on the day after Colonel St. George's death, but determined to return for the funeral. Still it was not for his own return that he was studying the times of trains and steamers now, for he knew he had to leave by the mail that night, and travel without pause, to reach Heaton in time for his Sunday morning's service. Opposite the girls, also at the table, sat the old lawyer and Mr. Pennington, each in his grave and sombre black; and, farther off, Mark Poyntz, half sitting, and half-leaning, against the high, narrow window-seat, seemed to have little to do with what was occurring, or what would eventually occur. At first, when he had come from the churchyard to Traveere, Dr. Armstrong had suavely inquired if he had any business to transact there, putting the question so adroitly that he felt Mr. Poyntz would be forced into equivocating in his confusion, and leaving the premises at once. But Mr. Poyntz had done nothing of the kind.

"I have attended Colonel St. George's funeral as a family connection," he said, "and by that right I wait until Doyle considers all business matters over, and is ready to leave the house himself; for I intend to drive him back to Fintona."

"Would not a servant do as well?" inquired Dr. Armstrong, superciliously.

"Possibly," replied Mark, with the utmost composure; "but neither you nor I, Doctor Armstrong, have our own servants—here, in Miss St. George's house."

So the argument had ended, and Nuel Armstrong was conscious of looking a little baffled, though he schooled his face determinately.

"I have for a long time," observed the attorney, in a clear, business-like tone, "had in my possession the will of the late Colonel St. George, with a letter of trust. As all the property of which he died possessed must be contained in the iron chest which was in his own chamber, I propose, gentlemen, that we adjourn there first, that we may avoid disappointment and mortification if possible."

It was not an orthodox proceeding, but the old man's kind and honest heart dictated it. By the will he held, Colonel St. George had bequeathed to Nora, wholly and without reserve, everything of which he should die possessed; and there was even more than a shrewd suspicion in the old lawyer's mind that the will itself was a fraudulent imposture, and that the old man had died as poor as he had lived. So he would spare the girl even ten minutes of self-deception.

It was soon over—the digging out of the chest, the search in it, and the weak tarrying hope—all soon over. The safe was found empty, save for a few musty papers of no value; yet it was patent to the slowest capacity there that the lock had never been tampered with, nor the seal broken."

And now Nora had to hear her grandfather's will, and to know the while that it was a hollow mockery, and that all he could bequeath to her was the old ruined house and the useless animals. But this was no new pain for Nora.

"I always knew how poor I was," she said, smiling at the Vicar's sympathy; "didn't you?"

"A perfectly correct and legal farce," observed Mr. Doyle, as he refolded the paper, when he had read through the long and meaningless formula. "The only sensible thing the old man has done, Miss Nora, is to leave me sole guardian and executor. Don't you think so?"

"Thank you," said Nora, simply; "but it will be a thankless task for you, Mr. Doyle."

"Do you think," asked Nuel Armstrong, lifting his eyes for the first time from Nora's face, where they had fixed themselves with surprise, "that the letter you hold may contain an enclosure which would throw any light upon this matter, Doyle?"

"Not the slightest. And I have read the letter already," replied the attorney. "St. George gave it to me open, and wished me to read it. This will renders the letter void; but the letter can throw no light upon this irritating will."

"Is it possible," inquired Mr. Foster, rising in his restlessness,

and seating himself again the next moment, "that that iron chest has secret receptacles, a false back, or anything of that kind?"

"I thought of that," returned the lawyer, "as I examined it; but you will find that the most careful measurement will not disclose a secret recess. No, there is no doubt at all permitted us, though the house shall be well searched. The only ray of light in all this gloom, Miss St. George, is your own previous assurance of—your present condition."

"Yes," said Nora, quietly. "of course I knew how very poor I was. I have known it all my life, but I never thought of it till a few days ago, when grandpa told me how I was to earn my own livelihood."

"Oh, he told you that?" questioned the lawyer briskly. "That betrays a great deal. But I would have scarcely believed even that forethought in him."

"And he nearly consented," put in Will Foster, eagerly, "that she should accept a proposal of my mother's, and go to England to study with my younger sister. What do you think of that, sir?"

Quietly, standing with his hands behind him and his head bent forward, the Irish lawyer listened to the unfolding of Mr. Foster's proposition, and nodded his approval more than once.

"It is the very *beau idéal* of a plan," he said, heartily; for though he gave no evidence of the fact, his guardianship lay heavily already on his inexperienced shoulders. "Then if you can manage this year of study, Miss Nora, you will be all right, and the world will be your oyster, which you, with knowledge, will open—eh?"

"If I can really afford that year's study," said Nora, in her grave, straightforward way, "I shall not fear. I will work so hard that when the year is over——"

"Well, when the year is over?" interrogated Mr. Pennington, with a smile.

"You will see," she answered, and she even smiled too.

"It is only talk, Nora," whispered Dr. Armstrong, under his breath. "You will have no need to work. You forget, Doyle," he added, presently, aloud, "that for this time of preparation and study in England—as marked out by Mr. Foster, and, as he avers, his mother—Miss St. George must be possessed of funds, and you have just informed her that she is without this necessary adjunct."

"Then what do you propose?"

It was Mark who put the question, for Mr. Doyle seemed in no haste to reply, and the other gentlemen only gazed blankly at the speaker.

"I propose," rejoined Nuel, "the only course which I see open to my young relative—that is, to accept the home to which I am waiting to conduct her. I am a kinsman, and I have sufficient means to provide a home for her. I was her grandfather's trusted

friend, and have been her guardian and adviser all her life. What more natural than that she should come to me now ? ”

“As for that,” said the Vicar, meditatively, “she would be very welcome if she came to us ; but we are thinking of the future, and for that Mr. Foster’s project holds out much greater advantages.”

“Yes,” said Nora, smiling at Celia ; “kind as your thought is, Mr. Pennington, I know I could not work half steadily enough if I lived with Celia. It will be hard, of course, in any case, after my idle life, but it would be hardest of all at the Vicarage.”

“My offer is best, is it not, Nora ? ” queried Dr. Armstrong, flushing a little in his eagerness.

“Yours is very kind too,” she answered, while Will waited breathlessly for this reply ; but I should not think of that for one moment. Need I say again how determined I am to work, and not be idle ? ”

“Then if,” put in Mr. Pennington, “we could dispose of Traveere——”

A wistful smile curled Nora’s lips.

“Who would ever buy Traveere ? ” she asked.

“Now too,” added Celia, “when the half of it is only a heap of rubbish.”

“It is not of very much value,” interposed the attorney, speaking as if deep in mental calculations ; “but in the event of all the animals going with it, Miss Nora, I know a purchaser.”

“The animals ! ” said Nora, wondering. “People have often said no one but grandpa would have kept Borak or Snow ? And there are only the pigs. Kitty has killed the last of the poultry now ; and the dogs are all so old and lazy, and ”—as her eyes fell on the hearth—“the cats”——

“There is not a very great marketable value, so to speak, in a cat,” observed the lawyer, “but still, perhaps, my client would include the cats in his purchase, and be inclined to pay accordingly. Of course I shall inquire about that ; meanwhile we will conclude that the purchase-money of Traveere supplies you with funds for education and pocket-money at present, Miss Nora, and that the future will secure its profits ? Now, gentlemen, I think that is all I need decide to-day, in my new capacity of guardian and trustee.”

“It is well to recollect you hold that last office,” interrupted Nuel Armstrong, sarcastically. “Even though nothing is entrusted to you, you are of course still trustee, and it is an important office.”

“I agree with you, sir,” returned Mr. Doyle, affably. “Now, Miss Nora, I will wish you good-bye for the present. Pack up your things as soon as you can.”

“How will Miss St. George travel to England ? ” inquired Will, his fingers on his railway-guide. “Unfortunately I am

obliged to leave to-night ; but I could manage to come again for her."

"Quite unnecessary," interrupted Dr. Armstrong, his low smooth tones unusually hurried now. "I shall myself take my cousin to England, if I eventually allow her to go. At present I do not see that I am called upon to do so."

"Not being legal guardian to your cousin—I did not before this minute know of that near relationship"—said Mr. Doyle, placidly, "you have no need to worry yourself in the matter, Dr. Armstrong. You will of course travel with Miss Nora if you like ; at the same time you can also spare yourself if you like, for I shall certainly myself accompany my ward to England, to make all arrangements with the lady who has kindly proffered her co-operation."

"Thank you," said Will, heartily, though his heart failed him a little as he pictured how variable his mother's co-operation would be.

And then a few further matters were discussed, and Mr. Poyntz and the attorney prepared to leave. As Nora had steadfastly refused to leave Traveere and Kitty that day, Celia was determined to stay with her ; and Mr. Pennington—acting solely on Will Foster's cheery proposal—drove home to fetch his wife, as well as a basket of provisions from the Vicarage larder, which should supply the deficiencies at Traveere, if they all stayed to cheer Nora.

Mark thought they were still all chatting with Mr. Doyle in the hall, when, as he brought down his horses from the yard—having a firm conviction that they would walk over little Breen without the smallest qualm,—he saw Nora issue alone from the back door, and go slowly out among the gnarled old trees. Stopping his horses, he stood and called her by her name, in such a natural easy way, that, though she had started at first, she turned, and came up to him running, with genuine gladness in her eyes.

"Are you going at once, Mr. Poyntz?" she asked. "You hadn't said good-bye to me, had you?"

"Not yet. Are you content with what has been decided to-day?"

"Yes," she answered him, with simple earnestness ; "quite content, and very grateful to those who have put it into my power to work."

"You will like Mrs. Foster."

"Yes ; Will says so. But never his sister—I mean, I was thinking just then that it might be better for me to go to some sort of grown-up school,—if there are such things in England."

"But there are not. Schools never grow up in England."

"Mr. Poyntz," said Nora, fixing her eyes upon him with the

frankest scrutiny, "mustn't it be a curious person who has bought Traveere?"

"I think not," answered Mark, reflectively. "I believe there is valuable ore on the land, and some shrewd client of Mr. Doyle's has found it out."

"I have found it out," said Nora, laughing. "I suspected it before, but I wanted to be sure. I know the shrewd client of Mr. Doyle's, and I——" Here she broke off, and began to speak very earnestly. "Oh! Mr. Poynz, how good it was of you! The land is worth nothing; and of course you know it. And the animals"—she could not help the laugh coming back to her eyes—"are as useless and helpless as—as we have all been at Traveere for years and years. And there is Kitty. She says she is to live on here—and Breen. Oh, Mr. Poynz, how good you are to us all!"

"But I am not keeping *you* on at Traveere."

"No," she said, with her beautiful swift smile, "you are doing still more for me. I shall owe all my better life to you. I shall work—oh! so hard. And you shall see if I have wasted it all; though"—with a regretful sigh—"I have wasted so much already, and I shall be so slow compared with what other girls would be."

"Not a doubt of it. Your speed along the royal road will never equal Borak's across the bog."

"Oh! poor Borak!" said Nora, her lashes wet, in spite of her smile. "We shall never drive him again, Mr. Poynz, you and I—shall we?"

Though waiting for his answer, she was looking wistfully away among the trees, and so she did not see the answer his glance gave her. His words told her little enough, as he quoted lightly—

"Where is he who knows?"

"Mr. Poynz," said Nora, shyly, "if I might take Bran to England, I should be so much happier."

"If I thought you would," he said, "I would make it easy for you; but you would be mistaken indeed. First of all, Bran himself would fret, for he is too old to bear transplanting; and then Mrs. Foster's is a London house, and Bran would be subject to constant whippings; and——"

"I see," put in Nora, with an effort at cheerfulness; "it is wiser not; and he will be yours, so I don't mind. But I should like to have his collar."

Mark's hearty laugh was echoed in the crumbling walls of the old house, and Celia, hearing it, ran out to join them.

"Good-bye," he said then, giving his hand to Nora; "we *may* meet in England."

"Only *may*?" she questioned, too anxious for his reply to notice how closely and how tenderly he held her hand to the last moment.

"As I understand that you are to be buried in books for the whole year, of course no resurrection on behalf of an old friend is to be hoped for, so good-bye."

"Yes, I shall be very, very busy," assented Nora, with great gravity; "but still I hope I shall see you sometimes, even when I have not time to talk."

"And ask questions."

"Oh! Mr. Poynz," she said, with a total change in her voice, and a great dumb question already in her beautiful eyes, "what shall I do in England if I may not ask questions? If I met you I know I should have a hundred ready to ask, weighing me down utterly, and you would be so shocked, and so disappointed in me."

"Try me," replied Mark, laughing; and then he turned almost quickly from her, to bid good-bye to Miss Pennington.

Only in the briefest manner had he responded to the lawyer's varied remarks, when they reached Fintona, and Mr. Doyle offered his hand at parting; then he said, without any preparation—

"You will see that Miss St. George has money with her, for her own nameless girlish fancies; because cats sell well, you know."

"Generally," assented the attorney, with a twinkle in his eye.

"And, if I were you, I would not let that one tenant, young Corr, know just yet that he has an English landlord. You understand."

"Perfectly."

CHAPTER XIII.

Why travel on in fear?
We cannot fly from Fate, and Fate will find us.
MOORE.

ONCE more, and for the last time, Nora was driving Borak across the stretch of bog between Traveere and Kilver; and on the further seat of the old car was Celia, talkative and tearful, making much of this last hour of the girlish intercourse which was so soon to cease.

"When I went to school myself," she bemoaned, "it was not half so dismal, Nora, because there was the excitement of wondering what it would all be like, and—I suppose I did not care so much for you then as I do now."

"I hate good-bye," said Nora, swallowing the lump in her throat, and looking straight before her, defying the tears to pass that heavy fringe of lashes which so kindly broke their fall. "Even now I daren't remember that good-bye to you when you went to school, and my own desolation afterwards. Do you

know, Celia, for weeks I almost lived with you in England—and England of my own, of course, and tried to follow your tasks, and"—with a laugh—"feebly imitated them. I used to fancy you would write to me every day, and each letter would fill sheets and sheets of paper, and tell me everything."

"And did I?" smiled Celia through her tears.

"I soon found out," said Nora, adding no complaint of the meagre letters the young schoolgirl had sent, barren of any regret for the old times and the old friendship which seemed so quickly to have faded, "that no letters can be like having the persons themselves, and so I made up my mind to wait patiently for you." And then there came an involuntary sigh, of which Nora was unconscious, and which Celia could not interpret, knowing so little of the wide, inherent longing inseparable from a lonely romantic nature.

"Do you see," said Nora presently, fixing her eyes tenderly upon her steed's dejected head, "that Borak knows this is the last time I shall drive him? I wish he had a wife, Celia, that he mightn't be so lonely when I'm gone."

"I suppose you will never see him again," sighed Miss Pennington, as consolation. "He is too old for you to expect it, Mr. Poynz will be sure to have him shot soon."

"I think not," returned Nora, quietly. "He admired Borak, and—there isn't an atom of a cruel look in Mr. Poynz's face."

"Oh, no!" laughed Celia. "But why should he care to keep Borak if he has no use for him?"

"Because," said Nora, very earnestly, "he will know that, as soon as I have earned a good deal of money, I shall buy all the animals back again, if he will part with them. Oh, they shall have such a comfortable old age! I daresay Mr. Poynz's horses and dogs are never refused any luxury; and mine shall have just such a time, when I am rich."

"When you are rich!" echoed Celia, with a compassionate sigh. "How can you get rich, Nora?"

"By teaching," replied Nora, without hesitation. "For a whole year I shall do nothing but learn, and never think of anything except getting on. Then, you see, I shall be fit to teach, and I will be so industrious and so careful that I shall soon be rich."

"I don't think," observed Celia, pensively, "that I can fancy you ever devoted to lessons, Nora, or engrossed by them. And really, dear, people don't grow rich by teaching."

"Still," said Nora, with deep thought, "I shall go on thinking so. Wouldn't it be dull, Celia, if we might think only of what is *sure* to be? Then I—a girl like me, I mean—would not have one happy thought all day. Yet now," she added, with that rare smile of hers, which was so radiant, yet so dreamy, "I have thoughts which are as beautiful as a queen's could be, and they're quite as good as reality. So you see, Celia, I grow very rich, and

I have a luxurious stable for Borak, and big fires, and lions' skins where Bran lies ; and all the other dogs get so fat, and——"

"But what about yourself?" put in Celia, laughing.

"Oh, it would take me a whole day to tell you what comes to myself. I go all over the world, and stay in all the lovely countries, and I never see anything I couldn't buy ; and I ride and dance, and sing ; and servants in red and gold bring me just what I want, just at the minute I want it."

"That's very convenient," acceded Celia, with the kindest intention of setting things right, because you wouldn't know what to order, would you?"

"No," was the gentle, prompt response ; "so they always know what I want, and bring it. And sometimes you are so surprised when I give you something new—a beautiful cream-coloured horse, or a yacht with everything in it, or——"

"Oh, I am there then, am I?" inquired Miss Pennington, laughing.

"Yes—nearly always."

"Still," Celia added, looking with surprise into her companion's beautiful, rapt face, "I don't think you are quite wise, Nora dear. You know teaching never can make you rich, even a little, not to speak of the marvellous riches you think of—indeed, all the governesses I know are quite poor—so it would be wiser for you to give up these day-dreams of yours, and look your future in the face."

"There can be no face to our future, except what we ourselves give it," said Nora, in that simple way of hers which made the lesser nature feel the wiser of the two. "I do look my future in the face, Celia, and I see its face very beautiful. If it is not so really I shall not know till it is dead ; for, *excepting* in our thoughts, we cannot touch the future at all, can we?"

"But when it comes——"

"That is our present," said Nora, lightly ; "and we must bear its touch as we can. Why, here we are ! Oh, Celia, how quickly we seem to have come ! And yet I told Borak to walk as slowly as he could."

She had sprung from the car now, and was standing at Celia's side.

"I don't feel as if I could go in and bid them all good-bye," she said. "I wish it was over."

But Celia did not, and lengthened the process as skilfully as she could ; so that, when the boys had uttered their last regrets, the Vicar given his last advice and blessing, Mrs. Pennington her last kiss, and Celia her last embrace, Nora found that her time had been overstepped, and that she must hurry back to Traveere if she would be in time to meet Mr. Doyle on his arrival from Fintona.

"Good-bye, good-bye !" she whispered to Celia, with a catch

ing in her breath, and her eyes very dry and wide and wistful. "I shall come back—I must come back—the very day my year is over."

"We always think we must come back," said the Vicar, smiling, "when we are first leaving an old familiar spot. Wait a little before you insist on that, Nora. Shall I drive you?"

"No—no, thank you," replied Nora, hurriedly; "it will be easier to go back alone. Please don't forget me, though there is so little worth remembering. You will write to me, won't you? And tell me all about Kilver and Traveere, and the people, and the animals, and the fish. And, Nat, you will tell me if you win a prize; and, Tom, you won't let our squirrel die, and you will tell me about him; and—oh, I shall so long to see you all! But the next best thing will be hearing of you."

"I suppose Doyle will drive you through Kilver, presently, Nora," put in Mr. Pennington, "as you meet the train in Enniskillen?"

"Yes."

"Then we will give you another salute. What do you say, boys? Shall we be here at the gate to cheer Nora as she passes?"

The boys answered with a shout, and Nora, after a word of thanks, turned to take her seat, delighted to put off the dreaded last glance at the friendly faces which seemed so much dearer on this day than they had ever seemed before. Not one suspicion arose in her mind that these friends had done less for the neglected, solitary girl than the warmest love could dictate; not one memory of a cold greeting, or an indifferent reception of her warmly-proffered friendship.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Pennington, as she looked after the car on its homeward way, and saw Nora stand to look back, yet never wave her hand, as it had been her old habit to do to the boys. "I hope her box is well packed, Celia. Did you help her?"

"I did it all, mamma," answered Celia, wiping away a stray tear. "I knew I understood it better than Nora; she only sat and watched me, with her arms round Bran's neck. I'm sure I do not know how she will arrange about her things when she gets to Mrs. Foster's, for she has so very few."

"Well, I did my best in advising her," was Mrs. Pennington's placid remark. "I insisted on her having one thin evening dress—being black, it will last her a good while—and the others are at least respectably cut and made, which is more than her dresses have ever been before. I wanted to buy her a few pretty ready-made costumes, but she seemed to think it wicked to spend a shilling more than was absolutely necessary, and so she had her way in most things."

"I told her she was very unwise to venture to Mrs. Foster's house with so few things, and those so plain," said Celia, her eyes

on the distant car; "but she said she only went to learn, and it would be all right. She was so decided about it, in her gentle way, and so hopeful too, that I soon let it drop, mamma."

"It was just as well, dear. Poor little Nora! Now come in; she will not be past again under an hour and a half."

Very slowly Nora drove towards home, leaving the bog when she came in sight of Rachel Corr's cabin, and calmly allowing Borak to halt before the door, as was his usual custom. Mrs. Corr was busy in her little shop, but her tasks were left in a moment when she saw Nora enter; and such a look of tenderness came into the woman's anxious eyes that anyone—save the girl herself—would have marvelled over it. But Nora only felt, with a gleam of pleasure in her sadness, that here was an old, true friend to whom a good-bye was hard, too, to say.

"And is it for a whole year, Miss Nora?" Rachel asked, standing by Micky's chair, and keeping her eyes lowered, as Nora bade farewell to the delicate lad. "What a long time it will seem to us who are left here!"

"But I expect you will come to England to see Micky," said Nora, smiling, as she offered Michael her hand. "How delightful it will be one day to come unexpectedly on your dear face, Rachel, in a London street!"

"You would pass on, Miss Nora, and pretend never to have seen me before," commented Rachel, trying to look as if she meant it. "But it's not to London that I would go, if fate, or Micky, took me to England."

"I shall not be in London all the time either, Rachel," said Nora, knowing she must be scant of words if she meant to keep back the tears. "Certainly Mrs. Foster lives in London, so I shall be there chiefly; but Mr. Foster has a home in Surrey, you know, and I hope I shall go there too."

"In Surrey, Miss Nora—whereabouts?"

"Rachel stooped, as she spoke, to smooth the little calico cushion on which her son's shoulder rested, and Nora did not notice how long she was over the simple task.

"I don't know where, she said; "but it is quite a little village, and it is called Heaton. I will tell you more about it in my letters, Rachel."

"Mother"—Michael was looking up astonished into her bent face—"have ye hurrt yerself? What made ye start?"

"Nothing," was the quick reply. "You are so fanciful, Micky, it makes you talk nonsense."

"I suppose, Michael," said Nora, presently, "that you don't know yet where you will live in England?"

"Not yit, Miss Nora," answered the lad, his whole face brightening at the thought. "It's Mr. Poynz's servant I may be—that's all I know"

"And enough, isn't it? But you must look out for me in England, Micky, for a year. Then I shall come home."

"But where?" inquired Rachel, eagerly. "The old house will be gone, Miss Nora, won't it?"

"It seems to me," said Nora, with a sigh, "that all Ireland may be gone by then—a year is such an endless time. But how I am loitering, Rachel! Mr. Doyle will be tired of waiting. I am so sorry not to have seen Shan. Will you tell him so, and bid him good-bye for me, if I don't meet him?"

"If you *do* meet him, Miss Nora," said Rachel, speaking softly, as she followed Miss St. George to the cottage-door, "you need not tell him where you are going, need you?"

"Where I am going, Rachel! I am only going straight home."

"But I don't mean now," said the woman, her voice still lowered; "I mean in England. Never mind telling Shan about that village—I mean either about London or Surrey. I don't think he will dare ask, Miss Nora, dear! but, if he does, just pass it by, please. Good-bye, my dear little lady; good-bye, God bless you!"

Rachel added the last words hurriedly, as if she felt that her request had been understood the moment it was uttered, even without explanation, and she wished to hurry away from it. But Nora answered only with a hand-clasp and a long kiss. Then Borak went on sedately to Traveere, missing on his journey the gay encouragement to which he was accustomed, but not the warm lingering touch which he always expected when a journey was over. Of course Mr. Doyle was waiting, for Nora saw the fresh traces of wheels on the rough ground before the house, and so she knew the very hour had come for her departure. Lonely and desolate as the old home was, she could not think this thought without a wrench at her heart; and yet, when Breen came round to take the car, she smiled, and let Borak go. Could she not run to the stable presently and bid him good-bye when no one was present—this silent friend and companion of her girlhood?

Entering the house quietly, that Mr. Doyle might not hear her, she sped up the stairs to her own room, to linger there for the last time! To give the last look round the familiar scene which had known a whole life's yearnings, and had been the heart of home! Is it not best to close the door upon this silent farewell.

* * * * *

"An' it's waitin' an hour he's bin, me dear, an hour intirely, an' not much less. What! laughin' like, doaty, an' yet yer heart dhroppin' out o' yer side! Well, it's glad I be, sure, fur ye'll have a frind to spake to a wee. Ah, honey, its back agin. I'll wish ye frum the minnit ye lave the green sod o' Oula

Ireland, which it's meself don't think ye'll iver see agin, me dear, glory to God! Well, it's betther for ye it'll be, if it doan't harm ye, doaty. Oh, it's not so sorryful ye need to shoo yerself, Miss Nora, fur it isn't me'll be cryin' at all; it's that idget o' the wurld splashin' the pump on me face—the saints be good to me! Git down-sthairs, Miss Nora, and be eatin' a wee o' fry; sorra a thing could ye be wishin' betther for ye. Don't ye kiss me agin, now; sure ye won't? Sich nonsense it be's. An' ould Kitty cryin' here, iver an' alwis, as if ivery dhrop o' love in me heartt could come out o' me eyes at sight o' ye, an' at sound o' yer voice, keepin' th' ould house alive, mirover, since ye wurr a weeny little mischysome spurt. Now don't ye be stayin' here, Miss Nora, an' be lookin' at me. Sure it's niver an' niver more cheersome I wurr. Rin, an' take the bit an' sup."

"Kitty," said Nora, imagining that her voice was very cheerful because she wished it to be so, "you and Breen will keep my house when I've finished learning, and get a great deal of money; and Breen shall mind Borak, and we shall all be together again. Take care of Bran till then, and all of them."

"Nora!"

The summons came from the hall below, and made Nora start backwards.

"Yis, me dear," observed Kitty, with a gulp, "it be's the Dochtor's that come. It's meself that alwis thought he hadn't give ye up, mirover. Rin down, doaty, fur it's tired o' waitin' he be's."

But there was little of a run in the girl's step, as she answered Dr. Armstrong's summons.

"Why are *you* come, Nuel?" she asked, as she descended the last few steps without her usual leap. "Where is Mr. Doyle?"

"He will meet us in Enniskillen," replied Dr. Armstrong, offering her both his hands. "Come, Nora, and have some refreshment before we start."

She went with him into the old sitting-room, where Kitty had—in her own opinion—prepared a perfect feast, and she took her seat at the table, and began to answer his questions; but the only one she asked him he answered by a prompt negative.

"You will drive me through Kilver, Nuel? They will all be at the Vicarage gate to see me pass."

"I am not going through Kilver at all. You have seen enough of them, Nora; let them leave you to me now."

Gradually the old lump rose in her throat, and then, when she could make no further answer to his constant demands upon her, she rose from her place and went quietly from the room. For a few moments Dr. Armstrong paused, irresolute, and then he followed her out into the hall and listened. There was no sound

of the light, flying step, or of the sobbing he had dreaded. Stepping quietly almost without knowing it, he entered the bleak, bare room where, when he had last visited it, Nora had sat beside the dead. She stood there now, with her clasped hands before her eyes; but when she heard his step her hands fell, and her eyes met his, while still the great longing darkened them.

"Nora, love," he said, speaking with low intensity, "you very naturally wish to go round the old house once more for the last time. I quite understand the feeling, though it is such a desolate place. I will go with you, though, my darling, and make it less desolate. Come, we have not many minutes to spare."

"I have been," returned Nora, shrinking from him. "I will follow you, presently, Nuel. Let me stay here alone a minute. Remember how long this has been *my* home."

"I *do* remember," Nuel answered hastily. "I remember it with shame for those who kept you here. But that is over now, my love, and your home will be the happiest spot on earth. This absurd arrangement cannot be carried out. Am I a fool that they think I could submit to it? Let it go on for a time, while I make all ready, and then—— Nora," he whispered, breaking off suddenly, "I shall soon fetch you from those hypocrites who would serve their own purposes by detaining you, and then life shall be full of rapture for you. You shall choose your home, and the very joy of my life will be making it beautiful for you. Nora, my darling, how we will laugh then at all their pretty plans! Do not dream of a long separation—it would kill you, and make a miserable man of me. Think of how soon I shall fetch you. My darling, you will stay for me? Oh, the ecstasy when I take my beautiful wild bird to her own sweet nest!"

"Let us go now," put in Nora, speaking with calmness, though her heart beat timidly and nervously.

"Go!" he echoed, his tones eager and passionate. "Has not the word been ringing in my ears enough lately—through the night as well as the day—but it must come so coldly at last from the voice I love? You would *go*, you said. The choice was left with you, and you chose to *go*. What did it matter to you that I have no life or joy or hope without you—that if you go out of my life I shall walk like a dead man through the days and nights? Oh, what does it matter?" he repeated, low and ironically. "You are a woman, and you know how gratifying it is to trample on a man's heart, and laugh to see that the strength is yours, not his! What does it matter? Your beauty is not marred by *my* wasted passion. Oh, go—pray go! Nora," he cried, with a sudden spasm of pain, as she moved towards the door, "come back! I cannot take you away from this house—which will be haunted by your memory—until you promise me that you will wait for me. Promise me that no one else shall

fetch you from that drudgery in England to a home of your own. No one but myself."

"Nuel, I am so used to hearing wise speeches from you," said Nora, speaking quietly by a great effort, "that it is hard to believe I hear aright now; but I shall be sure to forget it the instant you begin to talk wisely to me again. There are the wheels—come!"

With a stern and moody expression on his face, Dr. Armstrong stood to watch Nora's last good-byes at the old house, and his gaze grew even savage as she threw her arms about old Kitty's neck, and gave her one long sobbing kiss.

It was a dog-cart which Dr. Armstrong had brought, and, just as he and Breen stood fastening Nora's box behind it, she uttered an exclamation of unfeigned gladness.

"Oh! Shan, I'm so glad to see you before I go! I could not bear to miss a single old friend."

"It's the harrd day, Miss Nora, that we be losin' ye," said Shan, his surly voice a little softened. "Where'll the bastes go?"

"They will stay here, Shan," she answered, giving him her hand; "they will all be cared for by Breen and Kitty."

"Thin it wurr the liyer bought 'em intirely?" inquired Shan, his small eyes wandering round the barren farm.

"Not he!"—It was Dr. Armstrong who put in the answer, with a curt and mocking laugh—"Now, Nora, we are ready."

"If it wurrn't the liyer," observed Shan, turning his old hat round in his hand, and wondering why he had so spontaneously taken it off at Nora's greeting, "who done it at all Dochtor?"

"No Irishman," was the reply, uttered with anger only half-suppressed. "Who but an Englishman would buy this worthless place, just to lay people under an obligation to him? I pity his Irish tenants—though, luckily, he has but yourself, Corr."

Almost before the words were finished, Dr. Armstrong had driven off; but Nora's last backward glance had shown her, even more plainly than Kitty's smile and Breen's grin, the lowering, savage scowl upon young Corr's face.

CHAPTER XIV.

A place where everyone's at home,
But all is strange to me.

Mrs. FOSTER's house in Great Cumberland Place was one of those London dwellings whose name is Legion. It was tall and narrow, its ruddy complexion darkened to a seedy brown by age and smoke, and its paint faded and crusty from the wear and tear

of too many London seasons. It had five rows of narrow windows, placed there, to all appearance, simply as background for a limited variety of potted shrubs, which, knowing no florescence, harboured the dust generously. Though even *they* could not help being depressed by the consciousness of being out of place a little, so long as Great Cumberland Place was not a legitimate cemetery, and those window-ledges—railed closely round like nursery fires—were not legitimate graves.

High up—so high that even the dust came all that way up only because every available nook and crevice below was filled—was the chamber of the two Misses Foster; for the dwelling was not a mansion of unlimited space, and this large upper chamber was very capable of containing two beds and two young ladies, even with the almost constant addition of a very diminutive French maid. And, though a tiny room adjoined it, which Miss Foster called her dressing-room, it enclosed her graceful form but seldom; for the advantage of a younger sister's unfailing attention and acute suggestions overbalanced any of those objections which Genevieve Foster would otherwise have urged against sharing any one's apartment.

On this evening Lucette had been dismissed unusually early, and Miss Foster was herself putting the finishing touches to her toilet, while her sister stood thoughtfully weighing the relative merits of pink and blue, before selecting the accoutrements for her crisp white grenadine.

"I should not wonder," she pondered aloud, betraying that her thoughts were twofold, as she laid first the pink sash, and then the blue, upon the frilled tunic, "if mamma does not begin at once to make much of her, just as if she were a guest. Mamma is so uncertain that I can never feel sure of her.

"But she listens to reason," observed the elder sister, advancing a little nearer the glass, as she put in her emerald ear-rings; "and we have had a sensible talk together about Miss St. George. She is no relative of ours, and no guest—not even an acquaintance. She is here for a special purpose, and she must be left to pursue that purpose conscientiously. It is, indeed, for her sake that I have urged mamma to let her continue her studies undisturbed."

"For her sake, of course; and, indeed, for mamma's too," observed Victoria Foster, folding together the blue sash, now that she had decided in favour of the pink. "Mamma would be the very last in the world to wish for another grown-up daughter."

"An awkward, uneducated daughter too," put in the elder sister, complacently, "who will have no idea of the very commonest usages of good society. Pooh! Mamma has too much regard for her own reputation."

"I don't at all agree with Will about Miss St. George's beauty,"

said Victoria presently. "Certainly I saw her only for a minute, but I think her style will not be taking in London."

"Taking!" echoed Miss Foster, with the calmest contempt. "Who is it to take? The girl will be at her lessons. If her beauty smites Miss Archer, all the better; but who else can it smite?"

"Will. He is coming this evening, you know; and he seemed so anxious about seeing her that perhaps he will be coming often now."

"Will is wiser than you imagine," rejoined the elder sister. "He is not one to marry on an income of three hundred pounds a year. You are a goose, Tory. Fasten this bracelet for me."

Thus the two girls stood facing each other before the toilet-table when their mother entered the room; and she smiled as she saw the profiles reflected in the glass—both fair and correct, with features unmarred by any eccentricity of character, and pale blue eyes, the fire of which could never hurt the large white lids. It was quite excusable in Mrs. Foster to be proud of her stylish daughters; and, if the satisfied glance rested longer on Genevieve because her eldest child had always occupied the largest place in her thoughts, it was unknown even to herself, and more from the ease with which Genevieve had herself appropriated this place than because she possessed any additional charm or any additional claim in the substantial advantage of property in her own right. That her grandfather should have bequeathed Genevieve a yearly income of two hundred pounds for pocket-money, seemed to the mother a most natural proceeding, considering how prettily Genevieve always received the old man; but Mrs. Foster was totally unconscious of Genevieve's having usurped the foremost place in her kindly, fickle heart.

"Well, mother," Miss Foster said, standing quiet under her sister's operation, "I suppose Nora St. George is still lying down. You will leave her to do so, of course."

"She did not lie down at all, my dear," returned Mrs. Foster, closing the door behind her, and beginning to draw on her gloves, but standing to do it, and betraying to both her daughters a little unusual nervousness; "she has been unpacking, and now she is with Miss Archer in the schoolroom."

"Why did not Miss Archer go home this afternoon, as usual?"

"I thought it wiser," explained Mrs. Foster, "and indeed kinder," with a timid air of deprecation, "to keep her this evening. Miss St. George would have felt so very lonely, as Tory would not consent to dine early and stay with her. I wish, even now, that you would stay with her, Tory."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Victoria, with quiet contempt. "Am I to be made a schoolgirl just to please this utter stranger, for

whom we have done a great deal too much already in allowing her to come here at all."

"But you *are* a schoolgirl, Tory," remarked her mother. "If you are not, why should Miss Archer and your masters come every day to teach you? I hope, my dear, that you will see the kindness of what I propose, and go and take tea with Miss Archer and your new *camarade*."

"No, indeed, mamma," said the young lady, hotly. "I will not be put down in this way for an interloper. I told you I must dine with you to-day—indeed, I shall do it every day now. What have I in common with this Irish girl?"

"Then you refuse to do as I ask you?" inquired the mother, rising with a sigh.

"Certainly I do. Even you," added Victoria, diplomatically, "would be sorry yourself afterwards, and ashamed too, for behaving so to a daughter of seventeen. Gena knows very well that I am as grown-up-looking as she is, and that I ought to do exactly as she does."

"You shall do it after to-day, if you will just keep Nora company on this occasion. She looks so very strange and lonely. Will you?"

"No, mamma, so do not ask me any more. I hate to refuse you."

"Perhaps Mrs. Foster took this fact on credit, or perhaps she was so thoroughly accustomed to have her wishes overruled by her daughters, that the surprise of a concession would have been amusing to her. Certain it is that she smiled, almost satisfied, when Victoria gave her a swift, abrupt little kiss after that decision of hers. Yet she still could not abandon her wish.

"If we were alone I should not mind," she sighed; "but Will will think it so very strange. Besides, Mr. Poyntz is coming, you know; and it seems he was in a manner connected with old Colonel St. George. Then I asked Dr. Armstrong to come in as soon as he could, for I took quite a fancy to him. He is handsome and well-bred; and besides that he was a friend of Will's. Mr. Doyle leaves London this evening, or I should have invited him, for during our interview he struck me as a sensible man. And I am sure, Tory, my dear, everyone will wonder at your leaving Nora."

"Just say," put in Miss Foster, in her slow, sibilant tones, "that Nora was tired, and wished to rest. They will think us *kind* to have left her, instead of unkind."

Mrs. Foster was refreshed by this proposition. Did not Genevieve always set things straight for her, and quietly turn her round into the wisest path to follow?

"Then I will go," she said, quite cheerfully, "and order tea into the school-room. Miss Archer and Nora will take it together, and then go together to the drawing-room to await us. The

worst of it is," she added, with a sigh, "Miss St. George does not look at all tired, but just as if she could start all over London sight-seeing this very minute."

"Oh, that, mamma," put in Victoria, encouragingly, "is the excitement of her new position! Of course she is tired. Do you think she will have a dress fit to come down to the drawing-room in? Gena described her as looking a regular peasant in Ireland; so I expect to be in a constant state of burning shame until this year is over."

"She has a black dress," said Mrs. Foster, ruminating; "I do not know what—I am not so quick as you girls—but I know she looks very lovely. "Not," she added, adroitly, as she noticed her elder daughter's reception of this criticism, "that I noticed her much. I daresay most persons would not consider her so very pretty. She looks restless, too, and yet is doing nothing."

"*Can* she do anything?" inquired Victoria of her sister, not heeding her mother's lame amendment.

"We must ask her," replied Genevieve, with a certain smiling emphasis that looked out of place upon her placid face. "I expect she will feel rather quenched in our rooms and society, considering to what she has been accustomed."

"There seems no prospect of it," observed Mrs. Foster, as she turned to leave the room. "I must go and speak to her. I hope Willoughby will not be vexed, but I know he is anxious to be kind to this girl, because she seems linked somehow with his old tutor's family."

"Will deserves a humiliation," observed Genevieve, "for having made use of us as he has done. I feel so angry when I allow myself to think of it. It was little better than an insult to lead you into such an arrangement."

"You forget, my dear," remarked the lady of the house, "that the money Nora's guardian pays me for this year's care and education, is very acceptable to me. You know very well how impossible I have found it lately to make both ends meet—even here; and yet you are always wishing for a more expensive house, you know. Will knows my difficulty, and he had a good motive in what he did."

"Oh, very," assented Genevieve, with a mocking laugh, after her mother had left the room; "a very excellent and unselfish motive, I am sure!"

"I hope," observed Victoria, with a last glance into the mirror, "that mamma will not be betrayed into telling anyone that Nora pays us for being here—just as if we kept a school! Of course it is bad enough to be obliged to have her, but for goodness' sake let us have credit for our charity."

And whether it were for "goodness' sake" or not, they *had* the credit in the time to come.

Rather slowly and unwillingly Mrs. Foster entered the school-

room—a small dull apartment at the back of the hall—and so impressed upon Nora that after the fatigue of her long journey it would be cruel to ask her to dine with them, that Nora felt that a dinner in London must be a long and wearisome ordeal from which Will's mother had most kindly released her.

"I shall be very glad of tea," she said, when she and the quiet governess with the tired eyes were left together again. "I am very hungry; are you, Miss Archer?"

"Only rather," replied Helen Archer, with a smile for the friendly, bright-faced girl who was so fresh after her long journey, and so unsubdued in this subjugating household; "I have not had a journey, as you have."

"I hope you live here always," said Nora, in her pretty coaxing voice.

"No," Miss Archer answered, going quietly on with her work; "I come every morning, and go away at four o'clock. I never before stayed even so late as this. To-night the footman is to see me home at ten."

"Is it far?" questioned Nora, looking earnestly into the worn face, and asking the question in no spirit of curiosity. "May I go home with you some day and see your dogs?"

Up to the roots of the hair, already sprinkled with gray, the slow pained colour mounted in the face to which no loving, flattering words had ever made the blush familiar. But Nora, in her innate modesty, understood no cause for this. She had not proposed seeing father, mother, brother, or sister, for her own delicate feeling had grasped at once the possibility of there being a lonely home like her own; but of course Miss Archer had dogs, and cats, and perhaps hens and chickens, and—ah, even perhaps a tall brown horse like Borak himself! Then why had she coloured and looked so sad at the mention of her home?

"I ought not to have asked that," confessed Nora humbly, "until I had tried to make you take me as a friend."

"Presently," said Helen, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, "you will see how little you will be tempted to make me a friend, however I may wish to call you so. My—my home is a good way off, Miss St. George, through many ugly, noisy streets; and I have no dogs, no cat even, and there is no one but myself."

"Then," observed Nora, speaking very earnestly—for she was not one to whom a hint was darkness—"I can only beg that some day you will let me come when you know me better, for I am very lonely too, and I have had a lonely home."

"Some day!" echoed Helen—and smiled then, for she could never guess what that coming was to mean.

"Miss Archer," cried a gay voice at the door, as it was opened a little way and a head was popped in, "how do you like your new pupil? Is not she beauti— By Jove, Nora, I never

dreamed of seeing you here! They—I—thought they told me you were resting."

Willoughby Foster was in the room now, shaking both Nora's hands at once, and looking into her face with the most eager delight and unfeigned admiration.

"I am so glad to see you, so rejoiced to welcome you in my mother's house. I cannot tell you what a joyful day this seems to me. All the way from Guildford the train seemed crawling like a snail. Poynz said it was delightful, and went to sleep; but I was aggravated to madness, knowing you would come before I was here to welcome you. Nora, you have grown more beautiful even since we parted a week ago."

"And older," Nora supplemented, standing back against the heavy, colourless curtain, with the easy grace which belonged to her. "Do you and Mr. Poynz live together?"

"No, but Poynz is often down at Heaton, and he was coming up to-day. Where are the girls?"

"Who are the girls?" inquired Nora, with a laugh in her eyes.

"My sisters, of course. They were not surely—" He paused, and turned to Miss Archer.

"The Misses Foster are at home," she announced, in that manner of quiet apathy which grows on solitary natures, as the moss grows on solitary graves.

"What are their names, Mr. Foster?" asked Nora, still with the smile in her eyes; "I understood that one was a little girl who would learn with me; and now I cannot tell them apart."

"They are awfully alike," assented Will, in his cordial way, "only Gena is calmer and cleverer—Genevieve her name is, but we call her Gena. Indeed I call her Jenny sometimes, but she objects to that elegant abbreviation. The other—your fellow-pupil, dear—is Victoria. Mother calls her Tory, which has a political sound I don't relish, yet, when I call her Vic., I feel myself encouraging false expectations of a poodle. I suppose the second bell will ring in a minute or two. I must dress like lightning. Once more, Nora dear, it is delightful to see you here. Good-bye now for five minutes."

"Mr. Foster thinks," observed Miss Archer, after he was gone, "that you will dine with them, and he will be disappointed." And then she looked into the girl's face with a power of scrutiny which grows natural to a skilful teacher; and, almost as easily as she had read Willoughby Foster's secret, she read Nora's simple unconsciousness of anything beyond the old childish friendship. What change would it make in the beautiful, girlish face when it should be known at last?

But these thoughts, of which Nora was so unconscious, were not allowed to linger on this evening, for Nora chatted pleasantly to the governess, now quaintly, now with unexpected thoughtfulness, yet always with a charm which made Helen Archer

wonder much, as she compared the girl with that description of her which Miss Foster had given her sister purposely in Helen's presence.

"Have you really finished tea, Miss St. George? You were so hungry, you said."

"I have really finished. What are we to do now?"

"We must go to the drawing-room."

Nora followed Miss Archer up the staircase, and into a large high room with tiny white chairs and couches sprinkled over a pale green carpet, like mushrooms on a smooth patch of pasture-land. Miss Archer sat down near the wall, and resumed the knitting she had brought from the school-room, but Nora went at once to one of the windows, and looked between the closed curtains.

"I wonder what it is all like," she said, as if speaking to herself.

A rustling sound behind never disturbed Nora in that gaze which showed her so little; and it was with a start that she dropped the curtain when Miss Foster, passing close beside her, pointedly requested her to do so.

"One likes one's drawing-room to be private property," Genevieve said; "not thrown open to the street in this blaze of light."

"Sit down, Miss St. George," said the lady of the house, in a mixed tone, compounded of the desire to be genial and please her son—whose vexation had been very apparent at dinner through Nora's non-appearance—and the desire to be frigid and please her daughters. How long did you say it was since your grandfather died?"

"Two weeks," answered Nora, with an icy stillness in her voice.

"Two weeks," repeated Mrs. Foster, placidly. "Then I think you should have had *crêpe* on your dress—indeed, that evening dress might have been entirely of *crêpe*. I like consistency."

"Yes," said Nora, "I thought it would be inconsistent to have *crêpe* when I could not afford it."

"It is inconsistent *not* to have it," murmured Mrs. Foster, looking kindly into the girl's face, though rather puzzled; "I do not go into further particulars. Has Miss Archer discovered how very backward you are?"

"Yes," returned Nora, smiling, as Helen raised her eyes for a moment. "She could not be with me two minutes without discovering that."

"You do not seem to take the fact much to heart," observed Genevieve, lying back in her easy chair.

"Perhaps the things we take most to heart we talk of least," said Nora, in her quiet, direct way.

"Then are we to understand that you *do* really grieve over your ignorance?"

"I—don't know," she answered, still with deep consideration. "Sometimes I'm afraid that, if I were not obliged to learn, I shouldn't care to do so; and then sometimes I'm so ashamed that I long to learn all day and night. I—"

Victoria Foster had sat down to the piano, and dashed into a brilliant valse; so Nora stopped, listening in silence from that moment until the last note was struck. Helen Archer, from her distant seat, watched the girl's face, and wondered.

"Miss St. George," said Genevieve, claiming her attention deliberately just as some one came into the room, and approached her chair, "surely you play yourself? Every girl plays in these days."

"No, they don't, Miss Foster," contradicted Nora, simply, "for I cannot."

"Then," returned Genevieve, clearly and slowly, "you sing, of course?"

"I—don't know."

Nora had been going to say she could sing Irish ballads, and a few airs she had picked up from Celia—and Will too—in the old times; but somehow, when she had begun her answer, and Mr. Poyntz had come up to her, and offered her his hand, the warm, amused greeting in his eyes stopped the explanation; and, though she fancied at that moment that possibly it might not matter whether she could or could not sing as educated girls did, yet the colour crept into her face when the explanation failed her.

"I'm afraid you will find it very difficult to learn to play now," observed Victoria, turning on the music-stool. "One's fingers never grow nimble on the keys unless one begins to practise quite early in life."

"And that," observed Mark, "is the soul of music—for one's fingers to be nimble on the keys."

"Nora," said Will, in a lowered tone, as he eagerly appropriated a seat next to her, "I've been so mad with my mother. When, before dinner, I just made the time to rush into her room to ask her how she liked you—I beg your pardon, but of course I knew she must like you immensely,—she never said a word about your sneaking out of dining with us. I didn't enjoy the meal a bit."

"I enjoyed mine," said Nora. Miss Archer, didn't you enjoy your tea?"

This was too much for any well-organised family to stand, and the very marked silence and stiffness which were intended to quench the governess's possible reply, proclaimed the fact at once. Miss Archer, without looking up, went on with her knitting in her seat on the border-land; Nora was keenly conscious of having invoked a chill upon the atmosphere; and Will moved his eyes uncomfortably under his mother's gaze."

"Dr. Armstrong."

The announcement came acceptably now, if never before within Nora's memory. She greeted him just as the others did, and then she found herself wondering at his courtly manners, never guessing how carefully he studied them for this night, when—in his own imagination—he was to stand in competition with the man against whom the worst passions of his nature were ready to rise in revolt. She watched him accost all the ladies in their turn, and then seat himself beside the younger Miss Foster, and entertain her easily, in his bland, fluent way. She saw that Will was pleased to see him, and that Mrs. Foster smiled when he spoke to her; and so she wondered whether she could have known Nuel all her life, and yet have been blind to his excellence.

"Of course I always heard how clever he was," she mused to herself, watching Victoria's gratified reception of his attentions, "and I suppose cleverness is *enough* to give us friends." For she understood just as little as Victoria Foster did, of Dr. Armstrong's motive in selecting for his especial attention this girl who—as he had found out from her brother—was to be Nora's companion in the school-room.

"Oh, yes!" Tory was saying, in a pleased tone, when presently her voice reached her mother's ears. "I do sometimes, of course, but generally I prefer driving. Do you particularly recommend a morning walk in Kensington Gardens, Dr. Armstrong?"

"Particularly," he answered, with a smile. "All young ladies who study should allow themselves morning exercise. That is physician's logic. May I come to-morrow morning and show you practically what I mean?"

"Will that be better than describing it to me now?" questioned Victoria, with a smile which carried him bravely over any trifling barrier which might have impeded further presumption.

"I boldly claim the permission that charming smile has given me," he said; and to-morrow morning I shall come to initiate you into the necessary training. Of course, as Miss St. George studies with you, she must come too."

"Where, Nuel?" asked Nora, putting in the question quite simply, and with no idea that she was infringing any social law by betraying that her ears had caught words not addressed to her.

Dr. Armstrong's lips tightened a little, and his bow to Victoria was somewhat forced.

"I would like to leave Miss Foster to explain her own arrangements to you at her own time, Nora. She will do it best."

"I suppose you have seen nothing of London yet, Miss St. George?" interrogated Mark Poynz.

He had been talking to Miss Archer, hardly apart from, though

on the edge of, the scattered group, and he still sat beside her now that he addressed Nora, at whose side Willoughby Foster remained immovable.

"No; we came through the streets in a close carriage, and very fast."

"You were asleep too, I daresay."

"No, nor even sleepy. But there were so many other carriages that I could scarcely see anything, though I tried very hard. I was thinking just now, when you came in from dinner, how much I had to see, and how delightful it would be to see the places I had read of; though of course those are very few, compared with those that other persons have read of."

"If you are not a walking encyclopædia of metropolitan information, you cannot, of course, enjoy life in its most exquisite completeness."

"Then I must study that knowledge before any other," said Nora, her eyes raised to Mark's, beautiful—in all their amusement—with the light of clear intelligence, "for I would like to enjoy life in its most exquisite completeness, Mr. Poyntz."

"You will soon grow very weary of it all," observed Miss Foster, aware that there lurked a vein of irony in Mark's speech, and fancying that she understood it.

Dr. Armstrong rose from his seat in a sudden inexplicable irritability; yet the next moment he could see no cause for his annoyance. Had he not always known that, modest as Nora was—diffident, too, as he saw that she could not help being in this uncongenial group—she had that straightforward fearlessness of unsuspicion, as well as the innate piquancy and love of fun, which made her as keen to see a jest as she was quick to respond to it? And could he hope to change her nature now, just because it was so much less agreeable to him to sit by and see her read the meaning of a stranger, than it had been in old times to bear her saucy reception of his own laboured jests?

But others besides Dr. Armstrong were disturbed by that cool way of Nora's, which seemed at variance with—and yet so well suited—the grave, questioning eyes and sensitive lips. Mrs. Foster, in quiet and meaning tones, asked her son why he laughed; but Genevieve, to her mother's surprise, laughed too, and asked Nora if she had not more important things to study than the London streets.

"Remember, Nora," put in Will, uttering heedlessly the words Dr. Armstrong longed to say, "that that is a branch of study which you cannot pursue alone."

"And I have so many which I *can* pursue alone," she said, pleasantly, "that I can very well postpone that."

"I shall show you a little of London before I return," interposed Dr. Armstrong, failing in his effort to say it with supreme indifference, or to look confident about it.

"Then you must stay in London for more than a year," returned Nora, demurely, "for I shall begin lessons to-morrow, if Miss Archer"—with a smile across at the governess—"will allow me; and I shall have no spare time."

"That resolve will soon die the death of most resolves," whispered Will. "It is impossible to fancy you plodding laboriously over your books, in school-room duress."

"It would be much kinder, my dear Willoughby," remarked his mother, significantly, "to encourage Miss St. George in her purpose. You yourself well understand the value of knowledge."

"I do; and if my health and other engagements had allowed me, I should have studied hard myself," observed young Foster, laughing at his own speech.

"I hope," said Nora, sedately, as she took a cup of tea from the tray a footman handed her, "that you have recovered from those frequent and serious attacks of fever lurgan you used to have, Mr. Foster."

"Miss St. George," began Genevieve, and then paused impressively until the footman had left the room. "Don't use those expressions, please. They may be Irish, and familiar to you, but if you employ them here, they will cause you to be considered—what I feel sure you are not—coarse and vulgar."

"Take care, Jenny," said Will, with a frown; "those are not words to use in conjunction with any lady's name. Besides, fever lurgan is no more Irish than English, and, whether it is a legitimate expression or not, I'm sure you know what it means even yourself."

"I only warned Miss St. George against using such language for her own sake," exclaimed Genevieve, coldly, as she rose. "I am sure she has no claim to be considered either coarse or vulgar, but I think it kind to advise her. Now, Mr. Poyuz, will you sing?"

"I am an utter stranger to you, Miss Foster," said Nora, looking up at her steadily for a moment, though her lips were far from steady, "and I was quite sure before I came that strangers would be shocked by many things I do and say. But I should have seen in a moment that you were displeased, even if you had not said—those words."

"I believe, Mrs. Foster," remarked Mr. Poyuz, just as easily as if that last discussion had been a parenthesis, "that the most favourable specimen extant of real fever lurgan is a young Irishman whom your son must have known in Kilver—I mean young Corr, Will. Miss St. George, what do you think?"

"Yes, Shan is very idle," replied Nora, her voice failing her a little even at this slight reminder of her old home; "but perhaps he will be better when his brother leaves. Micky is so delighted at the prospect, Mr. Poyuz."

"Excuse me," said Dr. Armstrong, turning for a moment from Victoria's smile to address Mark. "but is it really true that you have been rash enough to engage that young hypocrite."

"Wittingly, I have engaged no young hypocrite."

"Dr. Armstrong," laughed Will, "you will only waste time and energy if you attempt to fathom the Caliph's motive for any one of his eccentric acts. Don't try it. Some day, Nora, when you come to Heaton——"

"Miss St. George," interposed Mrs. Foster, with emphasis, though she smiled as she spoke, "I give you full permission to forbid my son's addressing you by your Christian name with such an absurd air of patronage. Don't drink that tea unless you wish to do so—Thomas forgot that you had taken tea before. Why did you take it?"

"I did it without thinking," said Nora, putting down her cup, and fancying that no one would understand why she could not again venture to raise it to her twitching lips.

"When you are in doubt what to do," said Miss Foster, pausing beside her with an air of great kindness, "you can always be guided by what Miss Archer does."

"That reminds me," said the lady of the house, turning graciously to the governess. "It is ten o'clock, and Thomas will now be at liberty."

Curtseying shyly to no one in particular, and murmuring a few unintelligible words to Mr. Poynz as he opened the door for her and bade her good night, Miss Archer left the room. But she had scarcely tied on her bonnet in the schoolroom, when Nora came quietly in, and, putting both hands on Helen's, kissed her gently and wistfully.

CHAPTER XV.

She cannot love,
She is so self-endeard.

Much Ado About Nothing.

"NO USE, Gena; your plans are wise enough, but I plainly foresee that there will be no such possibility as keeping the girl in the background. Who this evening would have imagined that she was a total stranger to us all?"

"No one," replied Miss Foster, curtly. The evening was over at last, and for the first time in her life she had been glad to say good night even to Mr. Poynz, and to shut herself up with her sister into their own room, where she might safely give utterance to her mortification. "And I am sure I do not know whether her own want of breeding was much more at fault than Will's ridiculous thoughtlessness in making her so prominent. Even mamma was inclined to do it, but as for Will, he was absurd!"

"Yet she never seemed confused, or even awkward," observed the younger sister, stifling a yawn.

"That is through her utter ignorance of society. She sees no difference between talking, in their wretched cabins, to those vagabond Irishmen she spoke of, and in our drawing-room to Mr. Poyntz. We ourselves must teach her the difference, though; and you will have more opportunities than I shall, Tory."

"It is all very well in theory," returned Victoria, pettishly, "but I feel quite confident that she will always get noticed a good deal. I do not much wonder at it either. You gave me no idea of her, Gena; I fancied she would be quite an ordinary-looking girl, and one who dropped her h's, or spoke with a brogue. Why, with such a face as hers, and such a figure, and such an easy grace as there is about her, she must win notice even without a word or smile! And then what a smile she has! It makes her eyes irresistible, even to me; and her voice might entice one to listen to the greatest nonsense ever spoken."

"Your opinion and Will's seem to coincide admirably," remarked Miss Foster, with cold superciliousness. "You had better go and tell him how amiably you agree with him."

"No, I am not so silly as that," rejoined Victoria with a laugh. "What I say to you here in private, I consider as safe as my own thoughts; and after all, Gena, it is as well for us to say what we think, as to pretend, and far better to be open with each other when nobody is by. You saw as plainly as I did how much every one noticed Miss St. George this evening."

"Will did," returned Genevieve, moodily. "Of course I saw that."

"And not Will only," added her sister, in a heavy, uncomplaining manner. "I saw Mr. Poyntz follow her a good deal with his eyes; and I don't believe she uttered a word he did not hear. By the way, what was it he said to you so quietly after she had left the room, when you turned to mamma and pretended to wonder why Nora went?"

"He said, had I not told her to do what Miss Archer did, and had not Miss Archer left the room?"

"Oh, I thought that was it!" said Victoria, yawning again. "He can be rather cool, can he not?"

"I don't know," was the petulant reply. "That did not strike me as wrong to say. He never says anything disagreeably."

"I suppose he stays in town for a time now!"

"Yes; and, Tory, of course you will encourage Miss St. George to keep to the school-room. This year of study will be so important to her."

"Doubtful," returned Victoria, curtly. "But I shall advise her to stick close. It will be all right if Will does not come teasing. If he does, and mother gives way to her silly indulgence——"

"But she will not," put in Genevieve, calmly, "if you and I dislike it. And, after all, if any one is to pay her attention, it had better be Will than—a lot of strangers. He cannot come to town often; and I shall tell mamma how injurious it would be to the girl's education if she went into society. It would be so strange to her that it would have a most dangerous charm."

"Especially if everyone is to be enchanted with her, and it is not unlikely. Why, I almost feel as if I could stare at her myself for a whole day! Just think what she would be if she were splendidly dressed?"

"She would still be only a peasant," said Miss Foster, her sibilant tones a little less cold than usual. "I am sure even Dr. Armstrong felt that this evening. He himself is a well-bred, educated man, and"—with rather a gracious smile—"he greatly devoted himself to you, Tory."

"Yes, he is handsome," assented Victoria, with forced carelessness, but apparently no further inclination to yawn; "and I believe he is going to stay in London for a time. He said it would depend on circumstances."

"I see," smiled the elder sister, meaningly. "Shall you go with him to Kensington Gardens to-morrow?"

"Yes, if he comes for me."

"And Nora?"

"Of course, or I must not go. But I shall take Miss Archer too, for I hate being one of three."

"Suppose she falls to your share now and then?" observed Genevieve, a little spitefully. Governess and pupil—it is but a natural division after all, you know."

"I do not intend to be Miss Archer's pupil any longer," asserted the younger sister, with decision. "I will not learn with Miss St. George. Now I am going to bed."

* * * * *

Mrs. Foster's nominal breakfast hour was half-past nine, but it was by no means unusual for the meal to last until noon, as neither Genevieve nor her mother ever seemed in haste to begin a fresh day. On the morning after Nora's arrival at Great Cumberland Place, however, it happened that both the lady of the house and the daughters had half finished their breakfast when the little marble timepiece struck ten.

"Ring, Tory," said her mother, without glancing up from her letters, as her younger daughter brought her her second cup of chocolate, "and send to hasten Nora St. George. I suppose she is in the school-room at work."

"She must have heard the breakfast-bell," observed Victoria, as she did her mother's bidding.

"So also must Willoughby," returned Mrs. Foster, good-humouredly; but "he is a delinquent too, you see."

"The cases are rather different," began Genevieve, as she

watched the time for an egg that was boiling over a spirit-lamp beside her.

But, before an explanation was vouchsafed, Thomas had entered, and was sent to the school-room on his errand. It was several minutes before he returned, and then (beyond the fact of Miss St. George's not having yet been seen by Miss Archer, who had sat alone in the school-room since nine o'clock) he told his mistress that Lucette said Miss St. George was not in her own room, and that one of the house-maids had seen her going out soon after seven o'clock.

"Alone?"

Miss Foster raised her head to ask the question rather sharply, and Thomas seemed to comprehend a motive in the inquiry; for, after his affirmative, he volunteered the further information that Mr. Willoughby had not yet left his room.

"This is very tiresome," fretted the lady of the house, pushing aside her letters. "What a ridiculous notion of Nora's to go out alone for the first time in London! She can have no idea how to find her way home, and will be sure to ask the wrong people. Well, we cannot help it. You can do nothing more, Thomas.

"We can do nothing, of course," added Genevieve, still—on behalf of her egg—following the hand of her watch with her eyes, as anxiously as a physician does while he holds his fingers on a patient's pulse.

"I suppose not," was her mother's uneasy rejoinder; and then almost in silence the meal went on to its close.

It was just half-past ten when Will appeared, with his gay and prompt apology—

"I intended to be up early to-day, too. But then it is so easy to get up early over-night, isn't it, Vic? Is everything cold? Why, mother, you look as vexed as if this were my own parish, and I had disgraced my cloth for good and all! Oh, I am always early at Heaton, and pick up the proverbial worm for breakfast! I suppose Nora hurried off to lessons, did she? I wish I had looked into the school-room as I passed, to see the novel sight of her industry, poor child! But I did not doubt seeing her here."

Mrs. Foster glanced from one daughter to the other, rather helplessly; and then, as if glad to rest her eyes on her son's cheery face, told him her last new worry, with much circumlocution. But Will had not heard half through the complaint when he was out in the hall, calling in one breath for his boots and for the maid who had met Nora on her way out.

"Nearly four hours ago!" he muttered, as he turned from questioning her. "Good Heavens! Where may not the child have wandered to by now?"

"Why should you be nervous, Willoughby?" said his elder sister, soothingly. "Miss St. George is not a child, you know,

though it is natural for you to look upon her as one. She has the instinct of self-preservation, doubtless, as strong as any of us, and will return as soon as it suits her."

"I cannot be responsible for a girl with these insane wandering propensities," moaned Mrs. Foster, plaintively. "I shall write at once to Mr. Doyle, and resign the charge you worried me into undertaking, Willoughby."

"If Dr. Armstrong comes while I am away," put in Will, heedless of the plaint, "tell him exactly how it has been, and that I am gone to seek her. He has a right to know all. And, Thomas, as soon as you can get off, take a hansom and go along the Bayswater Road, looking well about you for Miss St. George. By the way, what had she on?" he added, turning sharply to the housemaid, who still hovered about, conscious of an important rôle in this mystery.

"All black, sir! a tall black hat very forward on her head, as they aren't worn now"—ran on the maid, glibly—"and her long plat, just as she came yesterday. That would be noticeable, sir; but I saw she had a book in her hand, thin, like a lesson-book, turned backwards for the pages to be outside."

"If she has gone reading along the streets, and attempted to cross, who knows what——"

"Cannot you do something, and not stand staring like a fool?" put in Will, addressing the servant angrily to drown his sister's cheerful speech. "Call me a cab, and say 'The Langham' as fast as he can drive."

Just as the hall-door was opened, Dr. Armstrong came up to it, and in a few stammering words young Foster told him Nora was missing.

"But, Willoughby," Victoria Foster said, noticing how stiff Dr. Armstrong's face had grown, and yet trying to reconcile it with a note of gratification in his voice, "surely you do not expect to find Miss St. George at the Langham Hotel?"

"No, but Poyntz is there, and I should like his help, or, at any rate, his advice."

"Rather unnecessary, I should fancy," was the suave reply of Dr. Armstrong. "You and I are surely sufficient without a stranger's aid. May I ask what direction you will take?"

"The Langham first," maintained Will, sturdily; "we cannot have too much help or skill. Just picture Nora alone, so ignorant and so beautiful!"

"She will not be so helpless as you fancy," put in Genevieve, while Mrs. Foster, crying at the thought, turned back into the breakfast-room. "She can ask her way, and she is not by any means unused to taking care of herself; is she, Doctor Armstrong?"

"Not at all."

"But you do not understand," interposed Will, angry alike

with his sister and with Nuel Armstrong. "The fearlessness which was so natural to her at home cannot guard her from evil and danger here—and she is as innocent of both as a baby.

What? Stay for breakfast! Not I! Look after mother, Tory, and don't detain Dr. Armstrong. One of us will be sure to bring her home. Won't you girls go at once into the park, and hunt every corner? Remember, Nora would not keep to the public walks."

For about five minutes after young Foster had driven from the door, Nuel Armstrong stayed talking to the ladies, gleaning what particulars he could, but surreptitiously, as it were, under a running fire of light irrelevant remarks. When, however, he had left the house—to Victoria's surprise, without offering his escort to the park, if they intended personally to assist in the search—and Thomas had closed the outer door safely upon him, his whole face and bearing changed, and those who met him might well have wondered on what purpose he was bent.

Mrs. Foster was still weeping dolorously, when Miss Archer entered the breakfast-room and inquired if Miss Victoria Foster intended to study with her that morning. No, Miss Victoria Foster had no intention of studying at all that morning.

"Then," said the governess, quietly, "I should like to go out myself if you have no objection, Mrs. Foster, and see if I can meet Miss St. George. I am used to the London streets, and to being alone. I may possibly succeed even where one more clever and more active might fail."

"Perhaps, mamma," murmured Genevieve, with a smile, "the whole household had better turn out after this girl. She has not yet caused confusion enough—a girl without the faintest claim upon us."

CHAPTER XVI.

I do not compare still tarn with furious torrent,
Yet will the tarn overflow, assuaged in the lake be the torrent.
The Bothie of Tober-na-vuolich.

"Not a moment too soon!"

This was Willoughby Foster's mental ejaculation as he sprang from his hansom at the Langham, and saw Mr. Poynz's groom leading round a saddled horse, while Mark himself came out of the hotel.

"I am so glad not to have been one minute later," he cried, almost breathless in his eagerness. "You would have been gone, and I want you so badly, Poynz."

"Anything wrong?" asked Mark; but, coolly as he spoke, he was leading Will aside where no stray ears could hear, and his

strong, lined face grew a little sterner and more lined, as if he had tightened every muscle in his frame to hear.

"Nora went out this morning soon after seven o'clock, alone, and has not returned," gasped Will, fancying he had told his trouble very gradationally, and with fitting introduction.

"Alone?"

There had been a pause between Will Foster's excited communication and Mark's very quiet repetition of the word.

"Yes, alone. Oh, Poynz, where on earth can she be?"

"Who told you she left home alone?"

"One of the maids, who saw her go. Nora said 'good morning' to her on the stairs, and went straight out, between seven and eight o'clock. The girl did not watch which way she went, but she told me one or two things which will help us to trace her. She carried an open book, and she wore——"

"What she wore is not of the slightest moment," interrupted Mark, impatiently. "Why, man, do you think Miss St. George will be traced by what she *wore*? Go back now, for she may have returned. If not, what do you propose doing?"

"I fancy," said Will, trying to suppress his excitement, "that she would have strolled on unconsciously, looking into the shop-windows."

"Then you will follow them. I, having another fancy, will follow that. Take her back, Richards," Mr. Poynz added to his groom; "I shall not ride this morning."

"But, if you are really going to help me in my search," Will said—"and I thought you would, so I don't pretend to be surprised—would you not save time by riding?"

"Possibly, but I should ride over my best chances."

"You do not look alarmed," exclaimed poor Will, with a flush of something that might have been either envy or resentment. "If you only knew Nora's old habits of speaking to every one she meets, and her utter unsuspiciousness——"

"You know it—that will do just as well."

"And then think of her prettiness!"

"Not I. Now go, man, if you mean what you say."

Will's hansom was out of sight before Mark attempted to follow, but that was not to be wondered at, because its driver had so shrewdly guessed that speed would pay him best.

Yet Will had only just entered his mother's house, and received the depressing negative in answer to his impetuous inquiry, when Mark Poynz strolled up to the Marble Arch, looking around him.

He greeted a friend here and there, without stopping; and he passed—with only a bow—one gay open carriage to which a pair of bright eyes smiled an invitation, as the coachman of his own accord slackened his horses' speed at sight of him. But he stopped in the easiest and most leisurely manner, at one gate where a cheerful little shoeblack was resting with his hands in

his pockets, thinking perhaps of the harvest of pennies he had already garnered, though little thinking of the rich store ready to fall into his hand in one moment.

"This mornin', sir?" he interrogated, pondering what the gentleman had said to him so clearly and quietly. "This very mornin'? Yes, I rec'leck. I hadn't begun, but wur standin' up agen' the gate, talkin' to a friend o' mine that sweeps at th' Edgewur' Road, and—yes, I rec'leck. She come up and wur passin', but he 'eid 'er 'is 'and, and she nodded. They don't many of 'em nod in that sort of smilin' way, and so, in course, we noticed it, me and Tom Jennin's, and she give him a penny—two pennies, sir, if you wan't th' 'ole truth, an' then she went on. None o' *them* saw her," he volunteered, with a glance round at two flower-girls who stood against the Arch, "for they hadn't come; nor the peeler didn't see her. On'y me an' Tom seed her go on. Which way, sir? Why, straight past us into the park,—and she didn't ask the way nor nothin'. I looked after her a bit—so did Tom; and Tom said how purty she wur. Thank ye, sir. All that! Oh, thank ye, sir! Come back? Not she. I'd have know'd her in a minute, though she wur all black, and not swell. No, I 'aven't bin away. That's truth, sir, th' 'ole truth. Thank ye, sir."

Letting a possible penny pass him unnoticed in the hand of a meek-looking old gentleman with dusty boots, the lad stood to watch Mr. Poynz into the park.

"I'll know 'im agen," he muttered to himself, seizing his brush cheerfully. "No fear but what I'll know 'im! It ain't all swells as speaks so slap-up to a young chap like me."

Walking swiftly, while not a single face within sight escaped him, Mark went on across the park to the Serpentine, when his gaze grew even keener and more penetrating, yet his step more tardy. Once, just for a few moments, after he had stood and looked across the water, scanning each figure in the groups opposite, he put one hand over the stern gray eyes, as if their long close watch had wearied them; but almost immediately they were alert and watchful once more, and there was little sign of weariness in the handsome, resolute face as he went about among the scattered figures, questioning wherever there seemed the faintest chance of hearing of Nora. At last his gaze fixed itself upon a female figure in the distance sitting alone among the trees, solitary and darkly robed, yet no gleam of hope brightened his eyes, for this was not Nora's figure, and he knew that he could not be mistaken. Yet, after so many vain inquiries of idlers, and of the police, he went hopefully up to this young woman, who sat sewing at one end of a bench on which he also seated himself. She was a delicate-looking girl, and she glanced up shyly to answer when he spoke to her. It was as little in Mark's nature to waste the time to be spent in "doing" as it was

to frighten away confidence by abruptness and awkwardness ; so, very soon, and yet in that easy, pleasant manner of his which won its way with all, he gleaned from this young woman how, being far from strong, and living in a close, small room, her husband liked her to be out of doors as much as possible, now the weather was fine and warm ; and so sometimes, as he went through the park, he brought her with him, and left her to sit among the trees with her sewing. And she had something in her bag for her dinner, and would go home in time to rest and prepare tea for her husband's return. And it did her good.

Had she been there early that morning ? Mark asked, with real sympathy upon his face, though he did not put it into words.

Yes ; it was not later than nine o'clock when she parted from her husband just there.

Then had she chanced to see—— Mark's voice was very quiet and earnest, yet at its sound the woman dropped her work, and waited for every word, conscious that this stranger felt some anxiety which she must try to understand. Her thin lips parted as he described Nora in a few graphic words, and a flush had risen in her pale, thin cheeks when she answered—

"I saw her, sir. Yes, I can help you a little. What a good thing I had not gone away before you came ! Yet I don't know that I shall be of much use, sir ; it was so long ago. She was sitting just there when I came to this seat, after seeing my husband walk on ; and she was looking into the water most of the time, though once or twice I saw her begin to read. I looked at her a good deal. I dare say it seemed rude, but I couldn't help it. She was so pretty, sir, and seemed so unknowing like of the people about her. Yet she watched everything too. At last she saw me, and noticed, perhaps, that I looked ill, for she came and sat by me, and talked to me just as if she thought she ought to have known of my troubles. I guessed she didn't belong to London by that—and some other things, sir,—and I made bold to ask her. She laughed quite merrily, and said she had never seen London till to-day, and that she was so glad she had found the Thames. Then, sir, I told her—without thinking—that this wasn't the Thames ; and she said that she must see it then, and asked me how she was to go. I wished the moment she was gone I had not let her ; and now I see by your face how bad it was. But I didn't think it just at the time. She spoke so wise and kind about my illness, and my husband, and the pleasure for me of being out in the sunshine, that somehow I lost the fancy I had had before—and have had ever since—that she was very young, and wanted to be advised."

"I wish to Heaven you had not let her leave you !" put in Mark, with strong emotion.

"I wish I had not now, sir," was the troubled answer, "but

somehow, for all her gentleness, the young lady seemed so independent like, I fancied she was used to being alone. So I told her the best way to go to the river would be to take a cab. She called it a 'car' afterwards, and laughed at me for not understanding. I did one thing, though, sir—I took one liberty—I went with her to the cab-stand."

"At the gate?" interrogated Mr. Poynz, eagerly, as he rose.

"Yes, sir. The thought came into my head, when she asked me where she should find a cab, that I would go with her and choose. It sounds odd to you, sir, I dare say, but there's as much difference between cab-drivers as between gold and copper, and I thought I would like to choose for her, if she let me. She didn't suspect this, of course, and when she went quite naturally up to one great horse in a hansom cab, to stroke him, I just whispered to her to pray not to do that, sir, and to take another sort of cab; but she wouldn't—she said they would smother her. I could show you in a moment the man who took her, if he's there now."

"I should be so much obliged to you," said Mark. And then—being a fearless English gentleman, who needed no battle-field or sinking ship to call out the inherent heroism which gives the word its soul—he gave his arm to the sickly young sempstress, and led her carefully through the vehicles and passengers in the park.

"That's the man, sir!" she cried, delightedly, almost as soon as they came within sight of the cab-stand, pointing to a heavy-looking old fellow just getting down from his seat. "Oh! how lucky!"

Yes, the man remembered that particular fare of his very well, so he told Mr. Poynz, with an exceedingly feigned effort to recall what Mr. Poynz had alluded to, and what would naturally be expected to have escaped his memory. He took her half across Westminster Bridge; it must have been ten o'clock or thereabouts when they started—nearer eleven, perhaps. She said, Take her to the river; and he had gone through the parks, and had left her leaning over the bridge looking at the water.

Why had he been such a fool as to pull up on the bridge, and why had he not waited and brought her back.

"Why, simply coz she didn't tell me to."

Had she asked what he would charge to wait and bring her back?

"Well, yes," the man acknowledged, after a close investigation of Mark's face, "she asked me how much, and I told her a lower figure than any other man would have said—but then I don't mind much about a shilling or two."

"I see," said Mark, with his keen, straightforward gaze. "Then, when you found that she had not just that very low fare in her purse at the time, you waited and brought her back for

nothing—just for the honour of the thing, eh? I understand all that,” he interposed, carelessly as the man began to expostulate. “Wait one moment, and you shall take me to the very spot where you left the young lady. Half a dozen ordinary fares if you put some spirit into that sulky brute of yours!”

He waited a few moments to take down the address of the young woman, then got into the cab, and was driven hastily to Westminster, while the driver scented a pleasant and profitable mystery in this second puzzling fare.

He drew up his horse against the west parapet of the bridge, half across, and Mark left the cab quickly, and looked round.

“It was just here, sir,” the man said; “I left her standing just here, looking along the water in a rivery. Shall I wait sir?”

“As you like; but if, by questioning anyone about here, you can trace her, it will be worth a sovereign to you. Here is my address.”

The bridge was crowded with passengers; but, busy and engrossed, they passed to and fro, and Mark knew how vain it would be to question them. He paused to consider, looking over the bridge as Nora had done, and, while he did so, rapidly and incisively each possible action of hers shaped itself to him. He felt that she would not have turned back yet, nor gone forward along the noisy unattractive road. She would see how she could follow the river along the Albert Embankment, and that Mark decided she would have done. So he descended the steps and went on, groping for another clue. But no one whom he met or overtook could help him, and his heart had grown heavy as lead when he reached Lambeth Bridge, and felt how impossible it was to judge which way she would have taken here. But in this very spot a clue was again put into his hands, which in all his gratitude, he grasped full sadly, for he saw in what a dangerous entanglement the other end might be hidden. An old woman, standing to sell matches against the iron rails, had something besides her own woes to tell Mark, in answer to his clear and patient questioning.

She had seen the young lady he must mean, hours before—a very pretty young lady in mourning, with a wonderful plat that cost a deal of money, and a book, and a pretty voice—oh, yes, she'd heard her speak, more's the pity, she responded to Mark's quick interruption, and it was no wonder she should remember her so well, besides being sorry for her—poor young thing!—when the crowd pushed, and she so put out like, and yet would see right done to the child.

“For heaven's sake,” put in Mark, his eyes growing full of untold trouble, “tell me what you mean more quickly!”

It was but a short story when its simple facts were reached,

but it did not need the old woman's dismal interjections and exclamations to make it full of vague suggestive misery. She had seen Nora—there was never the faintest shadow of doubt in Mark's mind about its being Nora—walking along by the river, sometimes stopping to look over, and about her, as strangers do. Soon after that she had gone up into the road to sell a box of lights, and then had heard a scuffling, and angry voices and crying, and came back to see what it was. A gentleman had had his pocket picked, and had caught a little ragged boy, believing he had done it. It chanced, though, that the young lady had seen, and run up to the gentleman to point to the thief—a smart, bold-looking young woman, who had walked quietly on. A crowd had soon come, and a policeman, and then another, and they had taken the young lady with the others to the police-station. The gentleman was very sorry to hinder her—very—and said all the way there (for of course the old woman had followed in the crowd) how sorry he was; but she had not said anything except that it would be a pleasure to see the little boy released.

And that was all; for after they had all entered the police-station in Lower Kennington Lane, the old woman had come back to her accustomed haunts.

And that was all! And Mark, though his thoughts had filled up every sentence to an untold extent, uttered none of them, and only turned silently away, after dropping a shilling into the beggar's eager hand. Walking hurriedly on, and looking vainly for a cab, Mark passed through streets so noisy and defiled, and met with men and women so squalid and ill-favoured, that it was no wonder his pulses throbbed with pain as his thoughts followed Nora step by step along the narrow, tainted streets which led him most directly to the spot he sought. Mr. Poyntz had no difficulty in finding the police-station, with its lamp swinging out above the road; and here upon the steps stood a grave-looking, helmeted man, who, like the generality of his fellows, was keen to detect a gentleman, independently of well-cut clothes and easy bearing, and was able, as well as willing, to give Mr. Poyntz the information he sought.

"The young lady left here at once when her further attendance was unnecessary, sir," he said, glancing backwards at the clock, in answer to Mark's final question. "That must be two hours ago at least. She never asked me the way anywhere, until I begged her to let me call her a cab. Then she looked a little uncomfortable, and I fancied she hadn't the money with her, p'raps. But I couldn't say a word, for there was a sort of pride about her when she said she'd rather walk, but never said a word of why she did so, nor complained of having been brought out of her way. The gentleman whose pocket had been picked offered to see her home, but she refused—quite politely, sir, but

proud, I think. Yet afterwards she seemed very grateful to me when I took her as far as Kennington Cross, and directed her straight down to the river."

"To the river!"

"Yes, sir, it was to the river particular she asked to be directed; and so I thought she knew her way well enough when she once found herself by the river. So I took her to Prince's Road, and advised her to go straight on, asking the way whenever she felt uncertain; and she said, oh! she could easily do that, and smiled and thanked me. Thank you, sir! Yes, it *is* rather thirsty weather. I will see about it at once, sir, and telegraph to the Langham, as you say. Good day, sir."

Back again Mark went towards Lambeth Bridge, his brave heart sinking as he threaded the network of uncleanly streets, and felt at every turning how easily his faint clue might escape him now, sinking more and more heavily, as, again and again, always vainly, he stood to question idle women and precocious children.

Eagerly, when he reached the river again, he looked out for the old woman who had guided him before; and so grateful was he to find her in the same spot that she was able to feast upon his gratitude for many a day. And her answer to his question was so confident that Mr. Poyntz could not for a moment doubt that the poor old creature had, in a limited area, been assisting him in his search. The young lady had not passed back from Lambeth by the river—there was not the faintest doubt about that. Hearing this, Mark turned again, and followed street after street, through gloom, and noise, and impurity; and at last his long search was rewarded. Following a certain narrow dingy thoroughfare which he knew must lead him from East Lane towards Walworth Common, he stopped at the corners of one or two narrower and dingier still, and looked as every figure within sight—even the smoky forms leaning half through the upper windows. And presently he saw two persons walking together down one of the most wretched of these wretched streets, and at sight of them there came across him, swift as a lightning-flash, the realisation of what this search had been to him in its awful uncertainty, and, with that, the consciousness of what Nora's safety meant to him.

Almost like a girl's, the strong man's heart fluttered for some moments, and then his eyes, robbed again of their momentary gladness, fixed themselves with keenest scrutiny on the woman who walked at Nora's side, and was leading her so rapidly away from home—an elderly, well-dressed woman, gesticulating eagerly as she talked, and seeming to see no one in the street save the girl at her side, whose face, flushed very delicately in its weariness, was never once turned towards her, but looked on before, as if seeking some landmark which she might remember

as a guide. So Mark thought, in that moment of hesitation when—as she had not seen him—he had been tempted to stand back and follow Nora. Yet when the moment's doubt had passed, and he had overtaken her, the look of trust and gladness which broke over her face made it, in its joy and innocence, beautiful beyond words. But suddenly, to Mark's intense surprise, a rapid change took place in both her appearance and behaviour.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Poynz," she said, in the demurest manner. "I am going home now to Cumberland Place. I have come a little out of my way, I believe, and this lady is showing me the nearest way back."

"Is she?" inquired Mr. Poynz, putting Nora's hand within his arm in that fearless straightforward way of his which no one ever opposed. "Then we will repay her excessive courtesy by teaching her that this is not the way—direct or indirect—to your destination, and that her knowledge of these rustic byways of London had better in future be confined to herself."

"She saw me puzzled," explained Nora, wondering at the concentrated wrath in Mark's voice and eyes, "and she was kind enough to say she would go with me. She was with the crowd who came to the—prison, and she saw a policeman show me the way, so she guessed I didn't know London very well; and when he had left me, and gone back out of sight—so that I couldn't have asked him again if I wanted to—she came and said she knew my way, and would go with me. I thought it very kind."

"I am glad," said Mr. Poynz, addressing the woman very pointedly, "that you watched the policeman out of sight *first*; but there are others at hand, I have no doubt. Suppose you continue this chosen route of yours, and find one, before I do it for you?"

Even Nora could see then, by the woman's own face, a reason for Mr. Poynz's haughtiness.

"Did she—did she," faltered Nora, fixing her eyes on Mark's in questioning alarm, after the woman had passed on, "did she mean to rob me, then, Mr. Poynz, thinking I had money?"

"Yes, said Mark, uttering the word swiftly between his teeth. "Oh! child, child, if you have any pity for those who care for you, never wander this way again!"

"But they do not care for me," observed Nora, gravely.

"Was that why you left the house this morning?"

"Oh! no." And she even laughed as she answered—but Mark was versed enough in woman's ways to know that such laughter is often a mask for tears—"Oh! no, indeed! But I did so long for the fresh air and the sunshine—I—I suppose because I am so used to it. You see Mr. Poynz," she added, still defying the tears, "even in the *house* we had always plenty of air at Traveere, either through broken windows or through holes in

the doors. Have I been away a very long time? I am so hungry."

Mark had hailed a stray cab, and he put her in before he answered, and followed her when he had given instructions to the man. By that time she had forgotten her question, and he found her leaning her head against the side of the vehicle, and letting the lids fall wearily over her eyes. So he decided, in that instant, to relax a little in his stern intentions, guessing that, if Nora waited for refreshment until she reached home, the reception there might be calculated to ruin the appetite she now had. And not since yesterday could she have tasted food.

The horse was pulled up at last before the door of the Lambeth Police-station, and Mr. Poynz went in to report his discovery of Nora, and to suspend the official search. They then drove back again and over Vauxhall Bridge.

Before a pleasant, well-governed restaurant near Victoria Station Mr. Poynz stopped and dismissed his cab, leading Nora into a quiet, bright room, and ordering a meal which to the alert young waiter sounded very like an afternoon breakfast.

"I think," observed Mark, in his leisurely way, as he sat opposite Nora, and pretended that the meal was as essential to his welfare as to hers, while he could not help being amused by seeing with what a quaint, childish dignity she still defied her tears and weariness, "that this will be your last—as well as your first—attempt to enact 'rich and rare were the gems she wore' round any isle but Erin's; eh, Miss St. George?"

"Wasn't it well," interrogated Nora, laughing, "that I hadn't such gems as the girl in the song? That woman would have stolen them, wouldn't she? Has she ever tried to steal from you, Mr. Poynz?"

"Once."

"How wicked!" said Nora, looking wonderingly at him. "And I can see it must have been something very valuable."

"Finished already!" exclaimed Mark, rising abruptly. "Then I suppose we had better continue our journey. I wish it were over—though only for your sake, my child."

"I expect," she said, with an involuntary sigh, though still defying any dejection, "that Mrs. Foster will be so very angry, that you need not wish the journey over for *my* sake Mr. Poynz."

"Need I not? Then we will not hurry."

He said it in a quick, firm way, as if the uttered words were to seal a new resolution; and then they went out into the street together, and Mark looked each way for a cab.

"They are so close and stifling," sighed Nora, seeing what he wanted. "Is it too far for us to walk?"

"However pleasant I may know that would be, I am not quite such a bear as to allow it," Mark said, while the old resolution

vanished utterly now, and his plans of a quiet decorous return to Great Cumberland Place melted into air; "I should have you falling by the wayside. But we will take a hansom; that is pleasanter."

"Yes; but don't you call this a close car too?" laughed Nora, as she took her seat and he followed her. "I wonder how Borak would like it?"

"Wouldn't he feel curious in this crowd?" asked Mark, trying not to wonder if Nora could have any idea of what an icy reception awaited her at home. "Cannot you fancy his lofty disdain for the obese and glossy carriage-horses peculiar to this rural district?"

"Borak would feel lonely, wouldn't he? I know exactly how he feels," she said, an unconscious wistfulness in her low pretty voice.

"Oh, he would soon grow fond of it," asserted Mark, with diplomacy. "He would have too much sense to fret for Ireland, or for 'her sons unaccustomed to rebel commotion.'"

"Miss Foster will say poor Ireland's daughters are like her sons, won't she?" inquired Nora, speaking only a little woe-fully now, for she was looking out with interest, and even amusement, upon the buildings and the trees and the passing faces.

Two errands had Mark to make on his way, and, when the little case of wine from the top of the cab was left at the address given him that morning by the delicate young woman in the park, Nora's gladness was a pretty sight.

"We are nearly at home now," said Mark, as they went slowly up Park Lane. "What do you think altogether of your first experience of London? Not being content with the park, and its rivers and trees and flowers, you must needs seek the beauties of Lambeth. What do you think of them, Miss St. George?"

"If I hadn't seen them, I shouldn't have thought there were any poor people's houses here at all."

"You know it beyond a doubt now, don't you?" he asked, his voice moved still at the reminder. "Didn't you think the park very beautiful?"

"Very beautiful," she answered, thoughtfully. "Of course it would be so to you, wouldn't it, Mr. Poyntz? And I never saw anything like it in my life before. But it didn't seem wonderful—not like Lough Erne in the sunset."

"But some day you will see beautiful and wonderful spots upon our river—some day."

"Perhaps," she returned, with a sigh.

They had hardly stopped in Great Cumberland Place, when the door of Mrs. Foster's house was thrown open, and Will came out to the gate, eager, hot, and dusty.

"I had that very moment come in, seeking for tidings, as I

have come twenty times before, and all in vain," he cried, seizing Nora by the hand, "and I was just going out again in despair. What a splendid fellow you are, Poynz! At least half a dozen times to-day I've said that you would be the one to find her. Come, Nora, they are all in the drawing-room, and they will be so glad to see you. Miss Archer has been hunting for you all day, but, luckily *she* has just come in too."

"Mr. Foster," said Nora, very quietly, before they reached the drawing-room, "thank you for not scolding me."

"Scolding you!" echoed Will, with a nervous laugh. "My dear, I am only too grateful to get you back. Hush! Do not tell us anything about it, for you must be tired to death. How shall we ever be able to thank Mr. Poynz, Nora?"

"I wish I knew," she answered, glancing back at Mark.

"Here she is, mother!" cried Will, in the gladness of his heart; but Nora entered very timidly behind him, and her eyes were dark and feverish as she went up to Mrs. Foster and apologized for her absence.

"An apology is simply a mockery in such a case as this," said the lady of the house, for her placid temper had been gradually and effectually roused by the confusion her son had caused around her. "I suppose you have not even a *motive* to offer for your conduct?"

"No," replied the girl, conscious of looking very worn and mean and dusty in the midst of the fresh dinner-dresses. "I looked through the window when I was dressed, and I saw the Arch, and fancied it must lead to the gardens of the house; and I felt as if I could not begin to work hard till I had had one breath of fresh air."

"Why, you must have actually *leaned* through your window before you could see the Marble Arch!" said Genevieve, with an exclamation of intense astonishment. "I'm sure *mamma* would turn away a *housemaid* if she did such a thing."

"But I am not a housemaid."

The words were said with such a grave and simple dignity, that it would have been hard to read with what effort Nora suppressed the hot rebellious thoughts which were of new birth in her nature, and which grew fast as she stood under this supercilious scrutiny.

"No, you are not a housemaid," said Mrs. Foster, skilfully avoiding her son's glance of entreaty, "or I could perhaps have accounted for this very unladylike freak. Do you not understand, Miss St. George, that different behaviour and self-guidance are expected from different classes of society?"

"Not yet," answered Nora; "but perhaps I shall learn when I have learned what makes the different classes of society. Miss Archer, will you teach me that?"

"Miss Archer, do take Miss St. George away to rest," put in

Will, the peacemaker, seeing his mother's ill-suppressed anger. "She must be fearfully tired."

"You have wearied even Miss Archer," observed Genevieve Foster, pointedly.

"And upset the whole household," added her mother, taking the hint. "I am sure I cannot tell to what trouble and expense you have not subjected my son and Mr. Poynz."

Very quietly, as the first words were uttered, Nora had taken the governess's hand in hers; but now she turned to Mark, who stood darkly outlined against the long lace curtains, too angry just yet—or too much moved—to put into practice the intention which had brought him in.

"I have thanked you a little, Mr. Poynz, have I not, for the great trouble you took to find me; and for your kindness afterwards? But I shall never be able to tell you how happy I felt the very moment I saw you, and how I *could* not have been afraid or anxious after that, if I had tried. And I'm so much obliged to you, Will—Mr. Foster," she added, smiling into Will's perturbed face, "for looking for me; and so very, very sorry to have given the trouble."

"Miss St. George"—Genevieve Foster's summons arrested Nora just as she left the room with Miss Archer,—"of course you will be honest enough to tell your guardians all about this day. Mamma will not make you tell *us*, for we know we have no claim upon your confidence; but—as Dr. Armstrong impressively said—some one in authority ought to know. By this time your impropriety has made our name a byword in every quarter—reputable or disreputable,—and, for a time, I am sure I shall be ashamed to encounter a policeman."

"I have never mentioned your name—never once," asserted Nora, earnestly.

"Wonderful forbearance!" exclaimed Genevieve, with infinite amusement. "But do you suppose my brother could interest himself in your behalf without the fact soon being reported, and our name mixed up freely in the affair? We are too well known, unfortunately, for such a tale as this not to be soon noised eagerly abroad."

"But I am not known at all, and it is I who have done the wrong."

"Pray do not argue any more!" cried Mrs. Foster, plaintively. "I advise you—I have no power to do *more* than advise you, Miss St. George—to go and change your dress. Miss Archer, ring for tea in the school-room, will you? You must both be hungry. What, going, Mr. Poynz? Oh! pray stay and dine with us."

"This unpleasant escapade," put in Genevieve, playfully holding her hands behind her, as he offered his in farewell, "has put us all out, and we need to be soothed and cheered."

"Miss St. George herself," said Mark, in his quiet way, "most needs the soothing and cheering. She will suffer in many ways, I fear, for this day's fatigue."

"Perhaps it will be better for her in the end that she should suffer a little now," remarked Victoria, eagerly.

"Perhaps so," assented Mark, courteously. "But I am sure you will agree with me that weariness, and fear, and hunger, are suffering enough for those very advantageous purposes of education."

"Where did you find her? Please tell us all about it," pleaded Genevieve, motioning him to a seat beside her, and quite content that he should talk even of Nora, if he would stay to talk to her.

And so Mark waited, that they might learn from his lips the wisest and kindest version of Nora's wanderings.

Will had followed Miss Archer to the school-room, hoping that Nora would soon come down again from her room; but the dinner-bell summoned him before his waiting had won its reward.

Solitary in her little room at the top of the house, Nora struggled fiercely with that newly awakened passion, which she did not even understand, and which terrified her by its strength and vehemence.

"What is it?" she cried, as she pressed her throbbing temples. "Why am I to be so despised? Why am I fit only for their contempt? Oh! if I could go away again home—home—home! I am not fit to be here. My life has never been their life, and it is all impossible to me. If I could only be rich just for— No, no," she cried, clasping her burning hands together, as she walked backwards and forwards in the narrow room, "I would never do it! I would never avenge a word or thought. Oh! I'm glad to be poor, if riches only make us hard and cruel; only— If I could but go home, or grow patient! Oh! grandpa, grandpa!"

The tea had grown cold upon the school-room table when at last Helen Archer went up to Nora's room to try and tempt her down. When the girl opened the door her eyes were unutterably sad, but tearless, and burning with a feverish light; and her beautiful face was very wan and white. But Helen's gentle touch, and words of womanly tenderness—which had been rare to Nora all her life, but now were doubly so,—broke down her new and stern barricade of pride and misery. The dry, wide eyes looked out for one moment wonderingly through their gathering drops, and then the natural girlish flood of tears was unresisted, and the warm young nature clung with passionate longing to this new friend who, untried, was trusted by unconscious instinct. So certainly from hard, insurgent thoughts—and it might be from illness too—Helen's simple tenderness rescued the solitary girl

whose nature was a sealed book to those who had undertaken its guidance ; and—more fatal still to her in her unsuspicion—whose sweet patrician beauty was a continual sore to them.

"Nora," wrote Dr. Armstrong to her that night, as he wove his own narrow, unscrupulous plans in the London lodging he had that day secured, "I can see how unhappy you are in your new home ; and there is no cause on earth why you should be so. I intend to take you back with me, and to give you ease, enjoyment, luxuries, and—above all—*love*. Do they give you even *one* of these things ? I know best what is for your happiness, my love, and I have a home in which you will delight. No power shall tempt me to leave you where you are. This day has held misery enough to warn us both against such a thing. We will stay in London as long as you like, and can even live here, if you wish it ; but I will leave you to no life apart from mine."

With a pitiful little smile, Nora tore the letter into fragments. "I came to redeem my idle past, and make myself a future," she said, throwing the atoms of paper among the torn pages of Victoria's exercise-books, "and I will stay to do it."

CHAPTER XVII.

These arrows of yours, though they have hit me, they have not hurt ; they have no killing quality.—HOWELL.

THE dingy schoolroom in Great Cumberland Place was very silent this morning, not only because its two occupants were busy, but because neither the glad April music of the country, nor the restless loud pulsation of the town, could find its way through the hazy window-panes.

"I never shall remember," said Nora, breaking the silence at last, in a tone of perplexity, without raising her eyes from the list of questions over which she was pondering, "who—besides George IV.—was called 'the first gentleman in Europe.' I hope, whoever he was, he had more claim to the compliment. This is the last question but one, and I've looked all through my reference books in vain. Tell me, Miss Archer. Ah, do!"

"Louis d'Artois," the governess answered, smiling at the Irish coaxing. Then Nora buried herself again in her book, hurrying to do her task, because she knew a pause would be sure to take her thoughts away beyond the hope of recall.

"Even yet," thought Miss Archer, before bending her eyes again upon the exercise she was correcting, "it is only by a real effort that she can apply herself. But she makes the effort bravely still, as she has made it all through the year."

For—within just six days—a whole year has passed since Nora first began to study in this dismal room at Great Cumberland

Place. Day by day, morning and afternoon, had she sat there studying, with the governess who had tried so hard and so kindly to accommodate her patient, unambitious nature to the enthusiastic complex one of the girl whom she had grown to love so well—the girl who, though so solitary in this English home, made it for the first time feel like home to Helen, by her warm and ready sympathy, by her gaiety and frank affection.

So they were good friends now, the silent woman who had to look backward to her childhood for any brightness in her dreams, and the fearless, ardent girl who looked so credulously onward to the impossible pleasures life was to bring her.

Nora had studied without repining; while the spring melted into summer, and summer ripened to autumn; while autumn faded to winter and winter blossomed once more into spring. She asked for no holiday, however she might have longed for it; and, as neither Mrs. Foster nor her daughters considered the encouraging of holidays an item in their agreement, the days went on, filled only by these new tasks, against the weariness of which Nora fought so well.

But not everyone had been so indifferent to Nora's occasional enjoyment, and the effort had often been made, though always fruitlessly, to procure her a day's amusement or a few hours' change of air and ideas. Again and again had Miss Archer begged that in their leisure afternoons, or on a rare evening, she might show Nora some pretty spot she knew, beyond the usual boundaries of their walk, or some of the pictures about which they were never tired of talking; that she might procure for Nora an afternoon at Kew or Richmond, or an evening at Covent Garden or St. James's Hall, for she was even anxious to deny herself if she could have given a treat to Nora. They used to talk over these plans for days before, proposing to get away early, to go over one of the picture-galleries, and then, before the concert, to take tea in town, to lengthen the enjoyment and make it more a change. And it was well that the anticipation afforded such pleasure to them, for the reality never followed. Quite bright and pleasant these holidays were in the sunny groves of imagination, taking beautiful forms which might have dwarfed and darkened—so Helen Archer, after each refusal, tried to believe—if they had been led out into the bare plains of actual life.

Others too had planned holidays and pleasures for Nora, though she did not guess it. Willoughby Foster's entreaties for a visit to his home in Surrey, and the occasional distinctly-worded invitations of Mr. Poynz, were met by the same placid, extenuating negative, which, with all its justification, was a negative decisive. Mrs. Foster, having charge of this peculiarly situated girl, found it impossible to relieve herself of the constant and anxious burden of responsibility the charge involved, but was

determined to do her best to make the year a well and advisedly spent period of study, and then——

The wonderful, calm indulgence of that sudden suppression of what she had been about to say always, except in one rare instance, filled Mrs. Foster's hearers with admiration. How wise it was of her to allow her solid judgment of what was best for the girl's welfare to outweigh the inclinations of her kindly, cherishing, compliant disposition!

"The child's guardian left her in my care," she would add, gently dismissing the subject; "and, if I permit a repetition of the danger and disgrace in which she voluntarily placed herself on her first arrival here, I shall consider only myself to blame. I could not quite exonerate her, of course, but at the same time I could not blame *her* alone, as I could one of my own daughters, whose instincts are so reliable. Therefore I should blame myself."

For what, Mrs. Foster did not explain: but evidently she had no inclination to undergo that ordeal in her own person, for she kept Nora constantly at her tasks, and allowed her own daughters unrestrainedly to follow their "reliable instincts."

Once Nora had accompanied Dr. Armstrong and Victoria Foster to the Albert Hall, and, while they whispered and laughed together, she had sat rapt in wonder and delight; but the possible pleasure of another such hour dissolved when his low whispering words were addressed to herself. The romance left everything when he showed her how little the music was to everybody but herself, and what his motive was in bringing her. And from that day no entreaty of his could win her from her books to join him and Victoria. How he chafed when his persistent efforts to amuse were accepted only by Nora's fellow student—who, indeed was only so in name, and rarely entered the schoolroom, except at the summons of her music-master—no one could guess, for he was always bland as usual, and there was good reason for Tory to build her fabric of self-satisfaction on his constant and unequivocal attentions. For how could she look behind the smiles, and see the contortions of jealousy and passion? And under his suave speeches how could she detect the notes of anger and mortified defeat?

So Miss Victoria Foster smiled on, and fancied Nuel Armstrong revelled in her smiles. After all, self-deception was pleasanter while it lasted than would have been the knowledge, or even the suspicion, that the experienced, intelligent physician valued Nora's slightest question, or even undisguised rebuff, beyond her own most gracious token of regard. He had spent much of the past year in England, for a month at a time leaving his Irish patients to his partner at Fintona; and again and again he had repeated his willingness to settle in London if Nora wished. When he would boldly assert this, Nora would gravely discuss

his prospects, adding simply that of course it could not signify to her, but it might be pleasant to him—did he think it would? It was after such speeches as these that Nucl found it so hard to curb the jealousy within him, and keep the bland expression on his face to mislead other eyes. For Nora, weary of telling him truthfully how impossible it would ever be to love him “like a lover,” could make only such answers as these, when, before others, he dared to refer to his future plans as affecting her. Long before the end of the year, he had given up his futile attempts to induce her to acknowledge to him that she was unhappy where she was, and longed to escape from her thralldom of work and seclusion; for even *he* had become aware that all persistency would be unavailing for that.

Through the whole twelve months, Mrs. Foster had not migrated with her household to the country or seaside, for she was wise enough to see that, by husbanding her resources during this year, the sum from Nora's guardian would be doubly valuable after Nora had left them. So she had paid one or two short visits with her younger daughter, but only while Genevieve was at home; and when Miss Foster herself went away on more protracted visits, her mother and sister were left at home. So that Nora was never allowed to find out the repressed good-nature of Mrs. Foster, or to know how much less dull the mother and son together, during Willoughby's visits, could make the ungenial London house. Swayed entirely by the influence of whoever last appealed to her, Mrs. Foster had, through this year of Nora's probation, been cold and indifferent to her, with occasional varying fits of exacting frigidity, and amiable resignation to the will of fate in consigning to her such a trying charge.

With Genevieve, Nora had had little to do, while still her influence was the depressing influence of the girl's life. For Genevieve the word was *self*, and, when she languidly acceded that the world was “very good,” the words were but at heart self-praise. Once or twice at first Nora had frankly and hotly replied to Miss Foster's unkind and contemptuous treatment, but she soon left it off; for, to the proud, warm-hearted girl, what could have been more difficult to bear, or fight with, than the smiling, compassionate remark—“You seem very suspicious, Miss St. George! it is a pity, for your own sake!”

So Nora had by degrees come to pass by, in simple dignity, Miss Foster's cutting observations or unkind actions, and, if the deepest motives had guided her, instead of the most simple, she could not more successfully have roused the jealous irritability which was hidden under Genevieve's gracious manner. And so, though there were still rare occasions when the honourable, untrained nature rose in prompt rebellion against some petty arrogance, and hotly stood on the defensive, such scenes were very brief and rare now; and Nora was always ready frankly to

acknowledge her share of the wrong. Then, if Miss Foster's chilly acceptance of her apology could move her to any feeling at all, it was only one of quiet amusement.

Celia Pennington had never come to London on that visit which Genevieve had foreshadowed for her on the Sunday she had spent at Kilver Vicarage. It was no new thing for Genevieve Foster graciously to deal forth those bubbles of invitation which float serenely from the giver's lips, and smoothly break and dissolve without a sound in the chaos of utter forgetfulness; but Nora did not know this, and so week by week, for fifty weeks, she had been anticipating from Celia the tidings of an approaching visit. Now of course that anticipation was over, for in one week more Nora would see her old companion at home. She had quite decided to return to Kilver, and had been carefully husbanding money sufficient to take her, if Mr. Doyle made no proposal of fetching or sending for her. It would be time for her to seek a situation as governess, but could she not do so there? And would it not be better and happier for her to be in Ireland than here, where, after twelve long months, she was still an utter stranger?

In spite of her sturdy application to her tasks, it was always with a very suspicious readiness that Nora welcomed any legitimate interruption of them; and so now, when, after a rap upon the door, Mr. Poynz entered the schoolroom, she was not at all unwilling to transfer her attention from Louis d'Artois to Mark himself. And Helen Archer turned from her corrections, and took up her knitting with a flush of pleasure upon her face—for what more welcome break had that schoolroom life than a visit from one who seemed to have taken them both as friends, governess and pupil alike?

"Isn't it a pity," said Nora, gravely, her hands folded on her book, "that they are all out? I mean a pity for you, Mr. Poynz, not for us. And you've been away three whole weeks, haven't you? Mrs. Foster will be so sorry to miss you."

"I should be exceedingly sorry to miss Mrs. Foster," returned Mark, tranquilly, "that I intend to wait for her return."

"I'm afraid they may drive a long way," Nora went on; "and they've been gone only about ten minutes."

"Hardly ten minutes yet."

"Did you know, then?" exclaimed Nora, with the liveliest surprise that he should have come in under those circumstances.

"Yes;

'I saw them go; one horse was blind,
The tails of both hung down behind,
Their shoes were on their feet.'

"Miss Foster had a new bonnet on," observed Nora, lifting her silken lashes to meet his quizzical gaze, and then, with a

blush, becoming aware of something at the fire which she had forgotten.

"I remarked it ; Miss Foster had a new bonnet, Miss Victoria Foster a newer bonnet, and Mrs. Foster the newest bonnet of all. Byron would have been charmed if he had had my passing opportunity, for they were—as he considered that a lady and her daughters should be—shining like a guinea and two seven-shilling pieces."

"They looked very stylish," observed Nora, anxiously following the new direction of Mark's eyes as he moved to the hearth-rug. "And how did you find out one horse was blind? Mrs. Foster doesn't like people to know. When I told her he would have reminded me a little of Borak if he had had any eyes, she didn't like it."

"I suppose you are working intensely hard, as usual?" observed Mark, pointedly; for just then he stood before a curious piece of mechanism. Two lengths of string were suspended from rulers which projected from the mantelpiece and were made secure there by the ballast of a pile of lesson-books. And his eyes wandered slowly down the curveting twine, and rested upon the apple which swung gently round at the extremity of each. "Are these two special experiments in your Gargantuan course of study, Miss St. George?"

"It depends," rejoined Nora, blushing a little, but accepting publicity now as inevitable, and making the best of it, "on what 'Gargantuan' means. But they will be very nice when they are quite done; much better than questions in history. I have another, Mr. Poyntz. Will you help me to fix it up and roast it for you?"

Why it took him so long to do this, Nora could not understand, as she had arranged her own quite as scientifically in half the time; and she laughed a good deal as she deftly rectified his mistakes, and drew Miss Archer into the task too. And why he should suppose that that last apple laboured under such a decided disadvantage that it was absolutely necessary for them all to watch it with tenderness, and to experimentalise constantly upon its puffy cheeks, and, in fact, to bestow in unison a peculiar amount of solicitude upon it, was a mystery which she had not fathomed even when the anxiety of cooking was over, and they were all enjoying the fruit of their labours—now in a spirit of the gravest criticism, and now with irrepressible laughter.

"That branch of study," observed Mark, when the feast was over, "is, as you say, Miss St. George, better than questions in history. The length of Charles the First's beard is a matter of insignificance compared with the secret of giving such a delicious flavour to——"

"The sugar did that," put in Nora, because he paused without finishing his sentence. "I used to roast apples at Travecre

sometimes. I wish Miss Archer were coming back with me to Traveere—I mean to Kilver."

"When do you go?"

"In about a week now. I don't know what day till Mr. Doyle writes. I think he will come for me."

"Do you? Now I shrewdly suspect he will be persuaded to depute some one else to the task. And so the year is over," Mark went on, his handsome, steadfast eyes upon her face, "and you have had your feast of the dainties which are bred in a book?"

"Yes, and know nothing even yet," asserted Nora, with a sigh.

"Of course not; except that you have acquired a vast experience of the world, which"—with a quizzical glance at the plates which held the remnants of their feast—"has evidently lost all its relish for you. Your education may well be considered complete, Miss St. George, now that you have attained the knowledge of the century, and understand how flat, stale, and unprofitable is every thing under the sun; and how essential it is for us that we should not all say what we mean, or on any account mean what we say."

"Fire away, Flanagan!"

Anything so comical as Nora's grave interposition of this remark, in that low, pretty voice of hers, could hardly be conceived; yet it was no wonder Miss Archer looked concerned and sorry.

"Oh!" cried the girl, distressed in a moment, even before she saw Helen's annoyance, but with a little defiance in her nervousness. "I didn't mean to say it, but its no harm. If you were Irish, Mr. Poynz, you'd know it wasn't. It isn't slang or—or anything, Miss Archer. It was a real message Cromwell sent to Flanagan's castle when he was besieging it. Our Vicar knows the castle, and Flanagan defended it with a great show, and threatened to fire his cannon unless Cromwell's men retreated. So Cromwell wrote him back that message, and it has passed into a sort of proverb in some parts of Ireland."

"What did Flanagan do?"

"He ran away. After all, he ran away very quickly, so—I don't think he could have been Irish."

"I expect he was," returned Miss Archer, with a smile. "Let us say so, as we are all English."

"It is very evident to me," said Mr. Poynz, "even now that the whole year is over, Miss Nora, that you are scarcely to be called educated."

"Yet I couldn't work harder even if I were," she rejoined, with a regretful sigh; "I was only yesterday pitying Lord Saye when I read that 'he had men about him that usually talked of a noun, and a verb, and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear.'"

"And you are very tired of it all?"

"No, no!" she answered, with pleasant eagerness. "Miss Archer makes lessons different for me. It is only a few that are tedious. She is very, very kind to me, and this year's hard work must have tired her very much."

"The year has contained for you, Nora, so little besides hard work," put in the governess.

"Then has everyone else been as unsuccessful as I have been to win you a holiday?" inquired Mr. Poynz, a little sternly. "Have you seen *nothing* of London?"

"Oh! yes," said Nora, wondering at his change of tone. "Though I should have known far less," she added, with a little heightening of the soft pink in her cheeks, "if I hadn't lost myself on my first morning. Yes, we have seen many things, Miss Archer and I. We look into every shop-window we pass—even into the windows of private houses sometimes—at least I do. It is so tempting to catch a glimpse of some one else's home.

"Rude rather."

"Yes, I know it is, and I try not; but I find myself doing it, and building little romances in the rooms, or about the people, if I see any. Then we look up the doorways of concert-halls and picture-galleries and theatres, and—talk about going."

"You want to go, then?" interrogated Mark, with unsuspected earnestness in his tone. "You want to see the world and its—follies?"

"They cannot be follies to me while I don't know them."

"And you really want to go?" he persisted, rising and standing with his back to the fire to look down upon her.

"Really—really!"

"Well, it will all come. And then what a pleasure you will have! Almost as great as that of the one who gives you the pleasure."

"But I am going to be a governess," said Nora, looking up gravely into his face. "Who will ever offer to take me then, as Miss Archer does now?"

"A pupil perhaps," replied Mark, briefly, turning away the discussion as he looked intently into her eyes. "Do you know that Foster heard this morning from Dr. Armstrong? He will soon be back in London again. The mother-country does not hold him long at a time now."

"Do you think," mused Nora, frankly returning his gaze, "that Victoria Foster will marry Nuel?"

"Well, it depends just a little, I should say, on whether he asks her to do so. If he is sufficiently a poet, he will of course understand that, though love sought is very excellent and comfortable in its way, still that 'given unsought' it is far more precious. If you do not know *that*, Miss St. George," he added, presently, smiling a little because her eyes were lowered and he

could not see them through their heavy fringe, "your year's study has indeed been of little use to you."

"To learn all that the poets tell us of love—not half of which they themselves could have believed—" put in Miss Archer, with an unaccountable tremor in her voice; Nora would require Plato's year, Mr. Poynz."

"Even that I don't understand," said Nora, looking anxiously at Helen, with puckered brow and tremulous lips. Is Plato's year very long?"

"Only about twenty-six thousand ordinary years."

"That," said Nora gravely, turning to Mark again as she spoke, "will show you how little I know."

"Not quite," opposed Mark, his voice now as grave as hers; "and I cannot bear to hear your self-dispraise. If you ever reach the depth of misery, my child, it will be when you can say, 'All I care to know I know.' When we remember that the very wisest and most learned sigh to think how little they can know at best, it ought to make us content to be always learning, not learned. There is no need to try hard for ever; it is often the best kind of knowledge which comes easiest. And do you know, Miss Nora, I think that Boileau never won such praise for his mighty intellect as is framed in those few words said of him by one who knew him—'He would speak ill of no one.'"

"But I," said Nora, sadly, "I speak ill of people often and often, especially of Genevieve Foster."

"Inexcusable!" commented Mark, shaking off his seriousness. "Miss Foster is only Turkish enough to object to a brother near the throne. Do you know what is the message I bear to Mrs. Foster?"

"No," cried Nora, all interest at once. "Is it from Heaton?"

"Yes," replied Mark, trying to resist watching the effect of every word upon her. "Will and I want her to bring you all down to Heaton for a day, as our guests—Will's and mine. You have been in England a whole year, yet have never seen Will's home."

"No, and I thought I should stay there a great deal. But perhaps it was better not; I could never have worked industriously in the country—in summer time. I suppose it is very beautiful there, Mr. Poynz?"

"You will see."

"Perhaps," she said wistfully. "But perhaps I may not."

"But you must; I have something to show you, and to tell you there."

"Something that would not sound so well here?"

"Yes; it is the story of a beautiful house down there, and must be told on the spot."

"And Miss Archer?" began Nora, looking wistfully at the governess.

"Miss Archer is to have a special message from us both," replied Mark, with a smile for Helen. "As soon as ever the day is fixed she will hear what a cordial invitation I bring her from Foster, and how anxiously I second it myself."

"And now, Mr. Poynz," Helen said, just as if she could not trust herself to answer him, "I hear unmistakable indications of Mrs. Foster's return."

When Mark, in his unhurried way, had bidden good-bye to Nora and Miss Archer, and descended to the drawing-room, he found the ladies of the house resting after their drive, each with a cup of tea in her hand.

"Thomas did not tell me you were here," exclaimed Mrs. Foster, a little surprised (though she would not have confessed it) at his having voluntarily informed her how long he had waited for her. "I am very sorry to have detained you—very."

"You see we could not have expected you, because you have been away so long," added Genevieve, with great affability. "Will you be persuaded to have a cup of tea, Mr. Poynz? You must be very tired of this delay, and I know you chafed at being obliged to wait so long."

"I have been very comfortable indeed," was Mark's reply

"You were expecting us every minute, of course."

"I expected you eventually, Miss Foster, but hardly every minute, for I met you an hour ago. No—no tea, thank you."

"Met us!" echoed Victoria, wondering how they could have missed seeing him, while Genevieve stood angrily looking from the window, conscious that, instead of being ashamed of having waited in the schoolroom, he seemed even anxious that they should be distinctly informed that he had done so, and had felt it no penance. "Met us, Mr. Poynz! Where?"

"Far in the west," quoted Mark, "remote from citizens, where Hyde Park ends and Bayswater begins.' You were speaking to a friend, or I might have stopped you. Mrs. Foster, I bring a message from Will, which I am here myself to endorse—I mean a joint invitation from him and myself. Will had a meeting to attend this evening, or he would, I believe, have been here too. Will you come and spend a day at Heaton, in the park—and on the lake, if you like—finishing up the evening at Will's lodgings? I will drive you down; and back as far as Guildford, if you must return the same night. There will be moonlight too, if you will fix a day early in next week."

"Suppose," said Mrs. Foster, glancing nervously at her elder daughter, who, though gracefully joining in her sister's pæan of delight, was waiting for her mother's reply, "we say the twenty-seventh, Mr. Poynz; will that suit you, and will it suit you, Gena?"

"On the twenty-seventh, mamma," Genevieve answered, reflectively, "we are engaged. Did you forget? Perhaps Mr.

Poynz will let us say the twenty-ninth. It will be moonlight for our drive even then. How enjoyable it will be !”

“And this invitation, Mrs. Foster,” Mark went on, “extends, if you please, to Miss St. George and Miss Archer.”

“As for Miss Archer,” put in Genevieve, with a laugh which was not overburdened with mirth, “that is one of Will’s philanthropic ideas ; and he would be much surprised, I’m sure, afterwards, if we, or you, Mr. Poynz, helped him to carry it out. And”—with a smile—“it would be cruel, too, to take her from Miss St. George, who, I am confident, will not be tempted from her work. We never can persuade her to go with us anywhere—never. Can we, Tory?”

“May I try?” asked Mark, in the gravest possible manner, and not at all as if he knew of the merry twinkle in his eyes.

“I will do so,” interrupted Mrs. Foster, rising, and glancing at Genevieve for approval of the tact she displayed ; “I will try to persuade her, if you will stay, Mr. Poynz. But she will not consent to go, I feel sure ; for, though not naturally inclined to study, she keeps closely at it, under the conviction that she is doing right. And indeed I think she is—poor child !”

Just as Mrs. Foster reached the door, it was opened from without, and Nora entered the room, with an open letter in her hand.

“Mrs. Foster,” she said, without seeming to look farther into the room, “Mr. Doyle has written to say he will come for me on the twenty-ninth. The letter has just arrived, and you told me to let you know as soon as ever I heard from him. You said it would be the twenty-eighth, didn’t you ? Does the change make it inconvenient ?”

The last words were added simply in politeness, for she had not seen that Genevieve was ill at ease, and dared not glance up to see whether Mr. Poynz had noticed what day they had *expected* to lose Nora.

“That will do very well,” was Mrs. Foster’s ready and half-whispered reply. “Now run away, my dear, and tell Miss Archer.”

“I told her first,” confessed Nora, honestly, but without intending to delay, until Mark’s voice arrested her.

“Before Miss St. George goes, may we fix upon another day to spend in Surrey—one that will equally suit us all, Mrs. Foster ? Have you any objection to promise me the twenty-eighth ?”

“I am afraid,” began Mrs. Foster, and looked to her daughter to finish the excuse.

“Yes, mamma, I’m afraid so too. You mean that we must go out to that tiresome old Mrs. Brunton’s on the twenty-eighth.”

“If that is so,” said Mark, quietly, “and your engagements cannot be postponed, I must ask you to choose a later day, and to let me take Miss St. George and Miss Archer alone on the

twenty-eighth; because after that they could not come at all."

"Of course," began Mrs. Foster, avoiding her daughter's eyes, and feeling more uncomfortable than she ever remembered to have felt before, "I must consent to put off a personal engagement to chaperon the girl of whom I have taken voluntary charge. I would not neglect my duty in any particular; but I am extremely doubtful, Mr. Poynz, as to whether her legal guardian would consent to such a distraction on her last day. Otherwise——"

"I will telegraph to Doyle with pleasure. That will be no trouble, and I shall have his answer in a few hours."

"He will think us mad!" exclaimed Genevieve, smiling stiffly in her effort to conceal her intense chagrin. "Mamma, you would not feel that incumbent upon you just for this once, would you? You will try to forget those scruples of yours that people call so wise and kind, and insist on Nora's taking this holiday. We will all insist upon it, Mr. Poynz, and we will all beg Miss Archer to come too. Tory, you will join mamma and me, won't you? And we will make a polite excuse to Mrs. Brunton, and be ready for you on the twenty-eighth, Mr. Poynz. It will be a delightful day, I am sure, for us all."

"Your concession gives me the greatest pleasure," said Mark cordially, "and Willoughby's will be equal to my own. Then I will call for you quite early. Nine o'clock, may I say?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I were but little happy if I could say how much."

THE morning of the 28th of April was so fair a one, that it even rose brightly above the grimy roofs in Great Cumberland Place. So fair that it looked with a sunny smile even through the dim window of that sitting-room of Helen Archer's, in Randolph Road, Kilburn. So fair, that it was just as it should be, for the dawn of that impossible day which had lived all night in Nora's dreams. And as she dressed—donning a few stray items of girlish finery which relieved the sombre blackness of the well-worn dress, and going constantly to the windows to look up, she sang softly to herself in the gladness of her heart.

Once or twice, during their hasty breakfast, she caught Genevieve Foster looking at her in a curious new way, as much inquisitive as contemptuous; and this, with the old repellant coldness of Miss Foster's manner, made her shrink within herself more than ever, and linger close to Helen Archer, when they were all summoned to start, and Mr. Poynz had drawn up his four horses at the door.

Nora's breath came in a gasp as she looked out. The handsome drag, with its high, cushioned seats, the shining of the silver on the harness, the liveried servants, Mr. Poyntz sitting so still with that dangerous collection of reins in his hand, and, above all, the four restive horses with their glossy coats and arched necks, filled Nora with a wonder of happiness which actually benumbed her, as pain might have done.

"Of course it is all very new to you," commented Miss Foster, pausing for a few moments beside her, and speaking very pointedly; "but I hope you will not show this fact before the servants. They will think you have lived your life in a desert, if you express any surprise; for, deaf and dumb as they may look, they will hear every word uttered on the drag."

"Will they?" questioned Nora, as she tried to realise that the gentleman who owned these splendid horses, and did not look afraid of driving them all at once, was the one who had driven Borak across the bog a year before, and had expressed himself so capable of appreciating Borak's speed. "How unpleasant for them! Won't they be able to think of anything else?"

This barbarous idea was below even the *contempt* of a civilised member of civilised society, and so Miss Foster turned away and left Nora to her wonder—a wonder which, before she had been seated many minutes behind the fleet high-stepping bays, had grown to a pleasure so exquisite that its outlook made her eyes lovely as a picture.

What a drive that was! Nora, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, looked from her height and wondered whether those she met *could* know what a very lovely world it was.

Without giving any reason for his choice of route, Mr. Poyntz drove round through Kew and Richmond, and, though he rarely addressed Nora when she sat so utterly silent in the intensity of enjoyment, he still had an answer ready for each of those breathless questions of hers—an answer which taught her something of the spots they passed, while it seemed only idle summer chat. And when, so often, a few words of hers betrayed unconsciously the knowledge she had hungrily gleaned and thoughtfully garnered, of this neighbourhood, which, month by month, she had been expecting to see; he gave no sign of his surprise, for that swift pleasant smile in his eyes would—even if they had seen it—have been misunderstood by the two girls who sat nearer to him. And all the time they entertained him with familiar allusions to the owners of the mansions and villas they passed; both complacently cognisant of the fact that their style of occupying their seats—leaning back just a trifle, without turning their heads, and allowing the pedestrian world to pass unseen *very* much below them—must give incalculable satisfaction to one who, like Mr.

Poynz, understood so well that unequivocal stamp of lofty society which the uninitiated could not counterfeit.

Through Kew to Richmond, crossing the park ; just as if Nora must see that her fairy world was as beautiful as she had imagined it ; speeding past rippled meadows, where even the shadows were beautiful, as they glided softly after the sunbeams, giving the crowd of golden buttercups their swift coy kiss, before they crossed the river, and left the sun-rays there like Nature's own sweet smile.

Through the long street of Kingston, while across the river Mark pointed out the tops of the chestnut-trees of Bushey Park, and a glimpse of the old red walls of Hampton Court. And now at every turn the river seemed to grow more beautiful with the sunlight slanting daintily among its tiny islands. Driving smoothly, almost at the water's edge, to Esher ; and then in and out amid giant trees, and dreamy dusky parks ; where here and there little clusters of bluebells lay in the openings among the trees, as if the summer grass could even reflect one bright glimpse of the blue summer sky.

On and on ; while Nora sat with clasped hands and happy eyes, living to the full of this wonderful day.

"You look," observed Miss Foster, just slightly turning from Nora a ring of glossy plats, and substituting for it a profile and the sweep of a long white feather, "as if you wanted to get down and gather flowers by the roadside. Now confess that you would really rather be walking, or idling about. You have admired everything except your luxurious seat. You would give it up willingly if you might wander in the fields at large, would you not ?"

"I would rather be just here. There is no place in all the world where I should like to be so well as here. If I were not, how could I *know* how exquisite it all is ?"

"Frank at any rate," murmured Miss Foster, moving her tiny lace parasol a little on one side, that she might see how Mr. Poynz received this avowal, and very glad to find that it had not made the slightest impression upon him.

"This sun is almost like the sun of June," he said without looking round ; "do not let me interfere with your shade."

So Genevieve, with a little forced laugh, lowered the dainty parasol again, marvelling to see Nora push back her shabby little winter hat, and let the sun revel in her eyes, and play as it would on her soft smooth skin

On and on ; through meadows lying in great waves between them and the distant hills ; through a wondrous living picture of wood and water and rich pasture-lands ; past silent mansions, lying proudly back among giant trees, between which (so thinly clad on this April day) Nora could now and then see figures

moving, and could wonder over them, and build romances round them in that useless way of hers; past scattered farms, from which the mellow lowing of the cattle made a fitting music for the spring morning, and from which now and then a figure came to the gateway, and, with shaded eyes, watched the carriage on its smooth swift way; past homely roadside cottages, with warm, sweet borderings of tulip and ranunculus in their gardens, and long narrow golden lines of crocus, over which crept lovingly the perfume of the sturdy wallflower, standing behind in sober richness of brown and amber.

Presently the houses stood more thickly on the margin of the road, then clustered about a long green, across which the horses sped among a few scattered, watching figures. And then the last country town was past, Mark said, and they would soon be in Guildford.

Not to stop, though! They drove through it, with only a passing glance at the High Street of the quiet, pretty, quaint old town, with its grim red hospital, its over-arching gables and carved door-ways; and with only a distant, momentary view of the narrow tardy river, and the grim, demolished castle, which they thought beautiful only because it stood so bravely in its solitude against the steady, constant stroke of Time. Then they turned eastward from the town, and rolled on, down sheltered lanes and across a baby river, to such a sweet and tranquil valley that it seemed as if that world of London which they had left in the morning must be in another hemisphere. And there, before them when they stopped, was an old gabled house, standing broad and low on a lawn of smoothest, brightest turf; and from the gate came Willoughby Foster, running like a boy to welcome them, and very ruddily conscious of his error the moment he found himself attempting to reach Nora first of all.

And this was Will's home—this pretty farm-house, with the hills rising behind it, and flowers in every window!

"At present it is," he said, smiling, in answer to Nora's question, as her eyes wandered over the calm and peaceful scene. "I shall stay here until some one makes a happier and better home for me, Nora."

"One hardly could," she commented, absently.

"You like it then," he queried, with great eagerness. "You like it better than London, Nora?"

"I don't know, because I don't know London yet."

His face fell; he had been so sure that her eyes were filled with delight and admiration for this valley where he lived and worked.

"I shall not stay here for ever, of course," he added, a little ruefully; "I'm as likely to live in London as anywhere, when old Keston comes home and gives away this living."

He was called from her before he had won an answer to this cheering remark, and then the horses were led away, the wraps

deposited in Will's rooms, and the little party set out for the spot where they were to dine, and where Mr. Foster had invited other guests to meet them.

"Because you see," he explained to his mother, "as I visit so much, and cannot ask ladies to my own house, I'm glad of such an opportunity as this to wipe off a mass of obligations."

And somehow every one of them, though with diverse motives, felt relieved that their party was to be increased by, and leavened with a foreign element.

"After dinner," Will said to Nora, keeping beside her and Miss Archer, though he had his mother on his arm, "I will show you the little church in the park, where I preach, and the pretty private walk from it to the house. You will be charmed, Nora."

"I am sure I shall. Is this," she asked, as they passed under a white stone arch where the double iron gates had been fastened open, "the park you mean, Mr. Foster?"—It was easy enough to Nora now to call her old playfellow by his surname, for during a whole year he had been spoken of to her by no other.

"Yes, this is old Keston's place. Isn't it magnificent? Though of course we want summer to see it in all its splendour."

"Where is the house?"

"Oh! we are not near it. We must turn down this side avenue now, and go to the Gothic house on the western borders of the park, where we meet our friends and lunch."

In the pretty building, where two men were laying dishes and wines upon a long table, quite a little crowd had assembled. They were chiefly girls, laughing light-heartedly; but there was a fair sprinkling, too, of the sterner sex, with here and there a matron, and one of those smiling, helpful single women who, in every parish under the sun, are to be found willing to devote themselves to parish matters. The liveliness of this group—as well as their expectation—ceased suddenly when the curate brought his friends among them; and, if they had much to learn from the London fashions of his mother and sisters, they had still more to marvel over in the rare beauty of that one friend of his who had come in winter dress, and a little damaged velvet hat, which could not certainly be the mode in London now. But, when this girl—after Mr. Foster's introduction—seemed to make herself, quite suddenly, and in the prettiest and gentlest way, at home among them, and had so much to say, in that low, sweet voice of hers, it was little wonder that they made a group around her as she stood against the verandah talking of the view. Or that they followed her when she wandered away among the trees, darting here and there after the shy wood-blossoms, or sitting recklessly upon a fence, to question them about the curious old Baron who owned this noble park, and yet could live away from it.

"Can you imagine," said Will, singling Mr. Poyntz from a

group, when the table was spread, and the two liveried servants who had come down on the drag were ready to cover all deficiencies in Will's recruits, "where Nora is?"

"Of course I can imagine," returned Mark, with a smile, "but I do not know."

"I hope she has not wandered off to see the church." Will went on, full of one desire.

"I hope not. You must show her that yourself, Foster, for——"

But Mark did not finish the thought aloud. He only resolved in his own mind that Will should have an opportunity during this day to tell Nora of that hope which made his face beam now at the very thought of her proximity.

What a dinner it was! For, though Will's sisters were not the only ones who called it luncheon, all knew it would be their chief meal that day, and that the most alluring dinner ever served could not follow it with any relish. The young curate looked happy as a king at his end of the long table, and his mother—wholly under his influence just now—beamed like a feminine, and somewhat more staid, reflection of him. Nora, still keeping beside Miss Archer, and talking chiefly to her—not in any shyness of her own, but because so few others noticed the governess's presence,—looked unconscious defiance at Genevieve Foster's few keen thrusts; and never once seemed to see those surprised glances with which the sisters invariably received any remark of hers which excited attention or elicited a laugh.

When the meal was over and the party dispersing, Mr. Poyntz came up to Nora, as she stood by one of the tiny arched windows of the long room.

"Miss St. George," he said, "will you come with me for a few minutes? I want to show you the lake. They will all be down there presently, and," he added, following the direction of her eyes, "Miss Archer has been taken possession of, you see, by that pleasant old lady with the gray curls. Come."

They went, talking merrily the while, across a wide and sunny stretch of grass, and then up a little wooded knoll. But when they reached the top of this, and Mark said, "There's the lake," they stood quite still to look down upon it. It lay on their right, in the hollow beyond this rising ground; and on their left, facing the water, stood a silent, uninhabited house—a long, lofty building of gray stone, with pointed arches over every door and window, and a tall tower at each corner.

Nora's eyes went back again down the gentle slope to the water, and then to the house again. Then once more to the lake shore, fastening themselves there upon a low, closed boat-house, the flat leaden roof of which caught the sun-rays and held them hotly. Then the girl's gaze, growing more thoughtful and puzzled, slowly traced the path from this little boat-house to one

wide, low window, opening like a door, in the tower nearest the lake, upon the eastern side of the house.

"I feel as if I had seen all this before," she said, "yet of course that is impossible."

"Unless you have seen it in a picture."

"A picture!" she echoed, thoughtfully. "How, and where, could I have seen it in a picture?"

"I will tell you," Mark said, gently. "I have brought you here on purpose to tell you."

So, in that very spot where the sketch was taken, which he had seen in Mrs. Corr's Irish cabin, he told Nora the story Rachel had narrated to him a year before.

CHAPTER XIX.

If he lived,
She knew not that he lived; if he were dead,
She knew not he was dead.

MOORE.

"EVERYTHING seems different now, Mr. Poynz. The house and the park, and the lake have all the shadow of that sad story on them."

"That shadow will soon be dispersed for you," said Mark, smiling into the eyes which had so slowly saddened while he spoke. "This happened so long ago that its memory cannot sadden to-day. I should not have told it to you if I had thought it could—at least, I hope I should not."

"I can recognize it easily now," said Nora, looking round the park, as they stood on that spot beside the lake to which the footprints in the snow had been traced on that night of which he had been telling her. "The sketch was surely taken from just here. How surprised you must have been, Mr. Poynz, when you saw it in Rachel's kitchen!"

"Greatly surprised," he acknowledged, smiling a little, though her gaze was far from his face. "Yet, except in a few particulars, the story Mrs. Corr told me that night had been long familiar to me."

"And here," said Nora, thoughtfully, looking down upon the grass at their feet, "the ground was torn, you say, and they knew he had struggled for his life?"

"There were the marks of a struggle here; and the snow was trampled, and the roots torn."

Then Nora's eyes went slowly round the lake, as she asked the question Mr. Poynz had put to Rachel, and which had been asked so many times in that long-ago of which they had been talking:

"Is it quite impossible that anyone could have escaped by swimming?"

Mark looked round too, not seeking for an answer, but simply from force of habit, as he followed out one old 'long thought.

"All around the lake," he said, "the snow lay deep and undisturbed. Except in this spot, no foot had touched it."

"Then he must lie there now," said Nora looking down on the sunlit water. "He— But you have not told me his name, Mr. Poynz. I suppose he was Lord Keston too, as this is Lord Keston's house."

"Hardly; but the title was on its way to him when he eluded it."

"Do you know, Mr. Poynz," said Nora, glancing frankly up into his face, "you speak almost as if you fancied he was not dead—was not even guilty."

"Do I?" questioned Mark; but she could not tell whether his voice was stirred by pleasure or annoyance. "Yes, I have that fancy often—even on this very spot."

"But how," asked Nora, deep in thought, "how could it be? I have tried to think, while you were telling me, if there could be another way; and it seems as if there could not."

"Yes, it seems," Mark answered, in his straightforward, resolute way; "but the truth, whatever it may be, is beyond the *seeming*, and I am going to reach it."

"Wasn't it many years ago?" still looking wonderingly up into his face.

"Yes, many years ago—the lifetime of a girl like you."

"And, Mr. Poynz, has no one ever before doubted Lord Keston's guilt or his death?"

"No, I believe not. How could they?"

"And yet you do?"

"Yes, I do. And against the utter certainty of guilt and death, which these silent eighteen years have all the more firmly rooted, I alone raise my hands."

"Perhaps," said Nora, gently, "such certainty may be—like Fear Castle—'weak enough, in every part, to melt before the strong man's eyes and fly the true of heart.'"

A little pause followed her words, while she looked across the lake, and saw nothing of that quiet gladness in her companion's face, which betrayed that she had received his words exactly as he had expected her to do.

"Mr. Poynz," she said, presently, as they turned from the boat-house towards the Hall, avoiding the gravelled path, and walking slowly on the grass, "does the—the murder that was committed in that quiet house so long ago, dishonour the title, now that another man bears it?"

"Yes," Mark replied, full gravely; "old as it is, this stain upon the title robs it of all worth. But it may be cleared some day, and that old house may be flooded with the sweetest sunshine heaven can pour upon earth. Think of what a home it might be—can you?"

"Yes, it is very beautiful," Nora said, musing over some new intensity in Mark's voice. "I wonder why Lord Keston doesn't live here."

"It is rather unnecessarily roomy for one solitary man," said Mark, with his quizzical eyes upon the wide gray building before him.

"Is Lord Keston a solitary man?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"He is in Florence, I believe."

"You know him, I suppose, Mr. Poynz?" inquired Nora—and in that moment she wondered for the first time why he had brought her there and told her such a sad story.

"Yes, I know him," Mark answered; "and, knowing him, I quite understand why he avoids this splendid desolate old mansion. He has a small luxurious villa on the Arno's bank, and only very rarely does he come to Heaton."

"Does he—" began Nora, and then she paused involuntarily and momentarily—"does *he* believe what you believe about that other night so many years ago?"

"I have never asked him, Miss St. George."

"How strange! I wonder what made you first begin to believe it yourself, Mr. Poynz. Can you remember?"

"Oh! very well," he answered, laughing. "When we go over that empty house together, I will show you where, and why, the idea first came to me."

"When shall we go over it?" inquired Nora, eagerly.

"Next time you are here."

"Oh! but ~~that~~ will never be!" she sighed, illogically. "My English year is over now, Mr. Poynz, and I am going back to Ireland. Did you not know?"

"I know," returned Mark, curtly, "that the year's study is over; but why could you not stay here? Why do you rush back to the Irish?"

"They were kinder. I mean," the girl added, correcting herself, while the rich shy colour rose in her cheeks, "that I know them better."

"I am English."

"But then you don't want a governess, Mr. Poynz?"

"Doubtful. But I don't believe you are tempted back by your search for some one in want of a governess. My firm conviction is that you cannot exist longer without a sight of Borak."

She glanced up, her eyes radiant in their delight.

"I am so glad! I was afraid you had forgotten, and I did so hope you wouldn't forget Borak."

"What did you think me? Why, Miss Nora, on the only verdant spot in all my sterile expanse of memory stands Borak, with every corner highly developed."

"He *was* rather full of corners," acquiesced Nora, ruefully; "but I am just as fond of him as if he were like—— I hope he will never see *your* horses, Mr. Poynz; they would make him feel so dejected."

"Not one of them," said Mark, decisively, "could ever take us two across the bog as Borak did; and in another day or two, Miss St. George, we will have just such another drive."

"Another!" echoed Nora, her eyes wistful a little in their astonishment. "I shall be in Ireland, alone; and—Borak is yours now, Mr. Poynz."

"I know it, and I am going to enjoy him on the bog at Traveere."

"You going to Traveere, Mr. Poynz! Oh! not really?" The words were scarcely more than whispered, yet he saw how beautiful her eyes were in that sudden gladness. But he only asked, in his leisurely way, if there were any law in Ireland to prevent a man's living on his own estate, when he thought fit.

"Mr. Poynz"—a long pause had followed his unanswered question, and Nora's tone revealed how full of pondering the silence had been—"you cannot stay at Traveere. Don't you remember how ruined and comfortless and melancholy it was?"

"I remember; but I remember something else, which you have probably forgotten. Once upon a time a common mallow on the roadside was touched by Mahomet's garment as he passed, and it changed at once into an exquisite geranium, and—best of all—has been a geranium ever since."

"I'm afraid," said Nora, laughing, "that Mahomet hasn't passed Traveere since I have been away, and made it beautiful."

"No—not since you have been away."

"Poor old Traveere!" sighed Nora, standing for a few moments to gaze round upon the scene—the sweep of park, and the solemn, silent house, with its wide terraces and lofty turreted walls. "Think of the contrast between this house now, and Traveere when you saw it, Mr. Poynz."

"When I do, this solitary place fares worse in my mind," said Mark. "But, when I fancy Traveere as it is now, and this house as it may be some day, 'blazed with lights and bray'd with minstrelsy,' and in every room the fairy brightness of——"

"Yes, Mr. Poynz—of *what* were you going to say?"

"Gas, perhaps. Can you fancy it?"

"I can fancy any happiness in such a spot as this," Nora said, but her tones were only full of a present happiness; not a fancied one at all.

"Even remembering," observed Mark, looking quizzically down upon her as they still stood between the lake and the house, "'golde all is not that doth golden seeme.'"

"Does that signify? If it 'seems,' we can enjoy the seeming so very much."

"You will, I trust, have much more, Miss St. George, than the seeming to enjoy through life——"

"And you, Mr. Poynz!" asked Nora, looking up surprised, when his words ceased so abruptly. "Is your home like this?"

"Not exactly. Should you care to see my home? If so I must drive you past it this evening. I have no right to inherit it quite yet, though, for no man can come to roost in his quarters there until he is 'fifty years of age and unmarried.'"

Nora's laugh rang out as merily as a child's.

"It's always hard at first," she said, "to tell whether you are joking or in earnest, Mr. Poynz. Miss Archer said this morning that my motto ought to be those lines of Hood's—

I do enjoy this bounteous, beauteous earth,
And dote upon a jest.

But I think it ought to be yours."

"Only sometimes," said Mark, hurriedly, as they turned their backs upon Heaton Place, and went on through the park; "but *you* are happy always—even in the musty schoolroom at Great Cumberland Place."

"I've never been very fond of that schoolroom," confessed Nora, sighing, though her eyes were full of fun. "I think 'a sense of *history*' the spirit daunted." Still, she added, with a resolute little shake of the head, "I never could have worked and studied properly and industriously here, so it is better as it is. Life *must* have been a holiday here. Now don't you think, Mr. Poynz, that Mr. Foster is just as happy as he can be?"

"Unless he wants something that he has not."

"But he has everything," rejoined Nora, her eyebrows raised just a little.

"Oh, everything," assented Mark, promptly; "even the prettiest pasture-land under the sun, and the tamest and meekest of flocks! Lucky Will! I've known the soldiers of the Cross to have a mutinous regiment under their command; I've known our spiritual pastors to have only evil spirits to exorcise, and our masters to be set by fate in a school of riotous insurgents. But Will is simply the shepherd among his yielding, obedient sheep. A happy fellow is he? Then what if he covets one lamb from another fold? Is not any unsatisfied desire just the one drop which turns the whole sweet draught to bitterness?"

"But Mr. Foster could not covet another clergyman's parish, I think," said Nora, wondering why Mr. Poynz did not laugh at the idea, instead of being so very unnecessarily grave. "I think no people could be fonder of their curate than these ladies are of Mr. Foster. Did you not notice it, Mr. Poynz?"

"I will notice now," promised Mark, with a laugh in his eyes. "After we join the group again, I will devote myself to

noticing that—and nothing more. There, Miss St. George. That is the last glimpse we shall have of the lake. Pretty, is it not, with the swans floating so daintily over the gleams of sunlight?"

No answer came from Nora, as she stood looking back upon the water, and Mark repeated his question.

"Do you think it pretty, Miss St. George?"

"Pretty, yes," she said, with an involuntary little shiver, "but I was thinking of what might lie below, and yet trying to hope there was no death here—as you are hoping. Mr. Poynz," she added still more reflectively, "I have only just remembered that, if Lord Keston did not give that poison, it must have been his cousin—didn't you say she was his cousin? You called her sometimes Kate, and sometimes Miss Giffard. It is more terrible still to think of its having been a girl."

"Far more terrible," he assented, quietly, as they walked on again. "I want you to come with me to see Miss Giffard. It will be a clearer answer to your misgiving than any I can give."

They walked for a time in silence after that, Nora wondering why Mr. Poynz should have proposed this, and wondering still more why it was that she felt such deep, real interest in the story he had told her of Heaton Place.

Presently, leaving the open park, they passed through a fir-wood, where the bare trees stretched like a boundless vista of columns. Then they came out again into a sheltered little valley on the outskirts of the park, where a low white house lay safe from every eastern breath, and where the buds of a drooping willow on the lawn shone like emeralds against the dark and sombre green of yews. Instead of walking up the lawn, Mark led Nora to the side of the house, and opened a narrow gate among the yews. She started a little as she entered the path to which it led her—a path cut among them.

"How cool and dim!" she said. "It is like sudden twilight."

"It is always twilight here," Mark answered, bending his head a little as he walked under the arched yews; "and another surprise awaits you at the end. This little avenue leads into such a sheltered yet sunny nook of the garden, that I have known all kind of summer flowers standing there in blossom before January has left us. See!"

But, though the flowers were dazzling in the little parterre to which their walk had suddenly opened, it was not their brilliance which had fixed Nora's astonished gaze; and, though in the next minute she was standing before a bed of blooming verbenas, it was only to offer her hand to a young man who was busily pegging down the plants.

"Micky!" she cried. "Just think of its being you, Micky!"

The lad had started to his feet as if her pretty pleasant greeting had struck him, and his cheeks were aflame when he saw her offered hand.

"No, Miss Nora," he said, taking his cap off. "You wurr our fairy princess over at home, an' it wurrn't annythin' you cud do cud make the difference, but it's not in Oireland we are now. I'm so—it's good it is to see yer face agin, Miss Nora."

"And it is good to see you, Micky," the girl responded, warmly; "and you look so well and so prosperous, and are growing quite a man; isn't he, Mr. Poynz?"

"Quite," agreed Mark, with a smile for the lad who sought the smile so timidly. "This is a rare spot for all uncertain plants; isn't it, Corr?"

"I on'y haven't wurrk enough, Miss Nora," Micky said, unable to keep his eyes from the face which was so sweet and so familiar to him. "Me place is too easy an' too good for me an' it's such a kind mistress Mr. Poynz give me. Oh' Miss Nora, it's happy as the day I shud be if I wurr shure all wurr roight at home!"

"Tell me of home, Micky."

"But it's so long since I wurr there, Miss Nora dear," said Micky, dropping more deeply into the brogue he was trying to lose. "I only remimber how it wurr missin' ye we wurr day after day. Mother doesn't wroite to me very often, on'y whin there's somethin' good to tell."

"And Shan?"

Micky's eyes went down to the plants at his feet, and then up, swiftly and suddenly, into Mr. Poynz's face, before he answered Nora, with a nervous effort,

"Yes, Miss Nora, Shan's—quite well."

"I shall see them all in another day or two, Micky," Nora said. "I am so glad to have met you before I go. I can describe it all to Rachel."

"You're really goin' thin, Miss Nora?"

"Really," smiled Nora; and her voice had no note of fear or apprehension in it.

They stayed a few minutes longer talking to the Irish lad, and then Mr. Poynz led Nora up to the house, just as one of the low windows was opened, and a lady came slowly out—a tall, fragile-looking lady of about forty years, in a mourning-dress, and with a snowy shawl around her shoulders, and a matronly cap upon her soft fair hair. She met Mark with a smile of real gladness, but the quiet dreamy gaze which Nora had noticed first upon her face, had returned to it by the time Mr. Poynz had introduced her.

"Miss St. George!" she repeated, as she gave the girl her thin soft hand, and then seemed inclined to leave it in Nora's clasp. "Did you say so, Mr. Poynz?"

"Nora St. George," Mark answered, intercepting Nora's own reply. "Is the name not quite strange to you?"

"Not quite." The answer was given slowly and thoughtfully, but the quiet, grave eyes brightened with momentary eagerness, and a flash of colour glided, as it were, across the pale still face. "You have seen my garden," she added, gently and almost shyly laying her fingers on Nora's arm; "will you come and see my pictures—if Mr. Poynz will spare you?"

There was little need for the wistful glance into Mark's face. He wanted a stroll round the garden, he said in his easy way, and would join them in a few minutes. But the few minutes grew to thirty, before Miss Giffard and Nora came out to the lawn.

"Thank you," the elder lady said quite simply, when Mark, bidding her good-bye, looked a little keenly from her face to Nora's.

"Mr. Poynz," observed Nora, thoughtfully walking at his side from the garden gate, "Miss Giffard is just what I fancied her while you told the story."

"And you do not think that she——"

"Oh, no!" cried the girl, intercepting his question with a shudder. "It could not have been, Mr. Poynz. *It could not.*"

"And she showed you her pictures," interrogated Mark. "Her own paintings, I suppose?"

"Yes; many of them. How fond she must be of painting! She showed me only the landscapes, though. There were several figure-sketches—not framed, but in a portfolio—but she hurried past those, and showed me only the views. She was so kind to me, Mr. Poynz," Nora added, with an earnestness which told that kindness, even though it visited her life in such rare gleams, fell on a grateful soil.

"I should not wonder. See, there is Will, looking among the trees for us, or our remains—yet it is barely an hour since we left him."

The tone was quick, and almost angry in the last few words, and Nora noticed it, while at that moment Mr. Foster caught sight of them, and waved his hat, with a call. One minute afterwards she was walking at the young curate's side, and Mark, who had so lightly given up his charge to his friend, had joined another group, determined that this friend should be missed as little as possible.

CHAPTER XX.

That day beneath the * * * trees,
When I refused to say—*not friend, but love*,
My power was just my beauty,
So much in me
You loved, I know; the something that's beneath
Heard not your call—uncalled, no answer came.

BROWNING.

"I AM taking you now," said Will Foster, as they followed one of the smaller avenues of the park, "to the little church where I

preach on Sunday afternoons. What has Poyntz shown you?"

"What a curious idea!" Will exclaimed, when Nora had told him of her visit to the cottage. "Why should he have taken you to see Miss Giffard, I wonder? No strangers ever go there; even I only go rarely."

"Why?" should have thought it would be the pleasantest visit you could pay. Doesn't she like clergymen?"

"Not particularly," laughed Will. "Still I do not mean that she dislikes me, or has me turned out; but I am painfully conscious of being kept outside her confidence. I go round and round the enclosure, and try every weak point, but I never even so much as see within. Sometimes," concluded Will, in his simple, unsuspicious way, "I am almost jealous of the Caliph, because I feel sure he has been within, and that it comforts her to lead him there."

"She seems rather lonely," Nora said, her eyes very thoughtful, as she walked on among the shadows.

"Lonely? Yes, indeed, and isolated too, which makes all the difference. Now the Caliph is lonely enough, in my opinion, but never isolated. You understand the difference, Nora?"

"I think so. Is that your church?"

"Yes. Ah! Nora dear, how long I have looked forward to bringing you here! This is the happiest day I have spent at Heaton."

"Have you spent it already, then? I haven't."

"But really, Nora, do listen. I am speaking the simple truth, not merely paying you a compliment."

"Of course not," said Nora, demurely, as her eyes wandered over the old building. "As a compliment is a pretty way of saying what you mean, I know that wasn't a compliment."

"But, Nora," pleaded Will, as, hat in hand, he held open the low arched door, "it is such a joy to me to see that you like Heaton. I always feel quite different here from what I do in London. I feel myself here," he went on, pleased to see that Nora had turned to him with her eyes full of questioning sympathy, "a man who has his work to do, and can do it. There I am but one unit in an endless line of figures, and I'm conscious there that my life can be of little use either to myself or to others."

"Then I expect," said Nora—and now her eyes had left his face and were slowly taking in the quaint features of the old building—"you have, like myself, seen London wrongly. I know I oftenest think what pleasures it holds, and how I might enjoy such pleasures, but I can feel too that it *may* be *there* I shall do my life's work."

"Not," exclaimed Will, confidently, "unless you choose it, Nora: and I think you will not choose it. Though it is all very

well to see the world now and then, one soon gets too much of it, and likes to forget it, in travel or in retirement with those we love. You think so, don't you, dear?"

"I think," she answered, gravely, "that somewhere it is said, 'He hath set the world in their heart'; and don't you think it may mean—but don't let us talk of this. It must be so much easier to *escape* the world than to overcome it. What a curious old church! Is it always as dim as this?"

"Yes, until we light those candles in the sconces—don't they remind you of Traveere, Nora?—and even then no one could read a fashionable prayer-book in these high-walled pews. There I stand behind that great carved screen, and can see nobody. I could scarcely recognise even you, if you were here, Nora."

"I would make myself recognised," she said, with a smile—for she never guessed what her next visit to the little church should be. "It would be of no use for us to come here to study each other's bonnets, would it?"

They returned to the porch presently, and Nora stood near one of the shadowy seats to look down the incline before them, while Will talked on, too much delighted at having her there to waste a moment in silence.

"You may judge of the innocence and simplicity of the place, Nora, when I tell you that, on a rainy afternoon, my congregation—the ladies, at any rate—leave their cloaks and umbrellas out here in the porch all through the service, and nothing has ever been missed. Are we not honest and unsuspicious?"

"Yes."

Nora's eyes had come back from the distant scene, and were taking in the fact that, under one old gray stone near her lay "Kerryline Bbrougger, oo dyde ov the krewill yewsidge ov ur usbun."

"And, Nora, my parishioners are such pleasant, friendly people. You have seen some of them to-day, and they are all just as sociable."

"Did you know Kerryline Bbrougger's usbun?" inquired Nora, in his meaning pause.

"Nora, do listen!" entreated Will. "I can see they all admire you greatly, and are disposed to welcome you. I heard old Mrs. Henley say you were lovely; and—— Nora, where are you going?"

"I wonder," said Nora, because he had hurried up, and stopped her at the churchyard-gate, "why Kerryline Bbrougger's usbun let that stone be put up. Such meekness doesn't look like krewill yewsidge, does it?"

"Do listen to me one minute, Nora," persisted Will, closing the gate behind them. "I do so want to win your promise. I really believe you have never yet thought seriously of marriage."

"Oh, indeed I have?" said Nora, with a look round, as if she

would learn her bearings with a view to escape. "I have just been thinking, most seriously, what an unfortunate thing it was for Kerryline Bbrougger."

"But—but," panted Will, desperately, "I mean for yourself, Nora. And I am sure no husband in the world would be so——"

But even hopeful Will could not afford to waste his earnest hints upon the desert air; and as Nora was by this time twenty yards away, speeding down the shadowy avenue, he let his breathless entreaty melt into an irrepressible smile, and started in pursuit. Ten minutes afterwards Genevieve Foster, walking towards her brother's lodgings, where the scattered groups were assembling for tea, called Mr. Poynz's attention to the two, as they came up laughing and breathless.

"How sweetly refreshing it is," she said, in her deliberate way, "to see a school-girl out for a holiday! I believe she thinks at such times that the world was created for herself alone. Well, the thought is pleasant of course to her, and does no one else any harm."

"No, no harm," acquiesced Mark, placidly, But he looked away rather quickly from Nora's daintily flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

Tea was taken in the pretty ivy-covered farm-house, one corner of which the curate called his home; and it was well that the two narrow old glass doors which served as windows could be set wide open in the balmy early evening, for the merry voices and the ready laughter could not be bounded by the low-ceiled room, and must have found *some* vent out into the wide, quiet scene beyond. Then Will's new cottage-piano was opened, and one after another of the guests was asked to sing or play; while those who were not asked looked on indifferently—regretfully perhaps when the universal request interrupted a pleasant *tête-à-tête*. But to Nora this was no wasted time, only one of the bits of colouring which formed the exquisite mosaic of the day. She smiled a little when Will Foster, in the full enjoyment of his position as host, his face beaming and his white ringed hands lively upon the keys, burst out jovially with the assertion that he was "*Home-less, ragged, and tanned*;" and her face was quizzical and rather wondering while one after another of the lady-guests took her seat and carolled fearlessly; but her eyes grew very grave and dreamy when Mr. Poynz sang "*Total Eclipse*."

"Nora," whispered Helen Archer, her cheeks still flushed, when she left the piano and joined her pupil, "wasn't it good of Mr. Poynz to ask me to play his accompaniment? Who else would have singled me out, just because no one had proposed *my* playing or singing?"

"He—he is not like the others," Nora said, very quietly.

"Now, Nora," pleaded Will, even while his younger sister was playing, "do sing us something. I want them all to hear you."

"Hush!" entreated Nora, with the utmost gravity. "Have some sympathy with poor Mary Ann's struggles to make herself intelligible through that running fire of demi-semi-quavers."

"Miss Archer use your influence," persisted Mr. Foster. "A bird who can sing and won't sing—you know the rest, Nora."

"I don't think that it is of any use to ask," said Helen quietly. For she fully understood Nora's refusal, when she saw how persistently Mrs. Foster—who stood on this occasion in the character of hostess—ignored the request when made to Nora, and how dexterously the two sisters of the host turned aside the proposal as it passed them.

"It is too bad!" he complained. "Poynz, do persuade Nora to sing to us. It is all very well for her to be so modest, but she ought to know that she has an exquisite voice, and is more musical——"

"*Most* musical, you mean," quoted Nora, with plaintive emphasis, "and so, of course, *most* melancholy. Mr. Poynz can see both facts."

"Plainly," assented Mark; "and both are gifts to be cultivated, Miss St George. How easily I can fancy you singing 'I would not, if I could, be gay.'"

"Mr. Poynz," put in Miss Foster, from the piano, where she stood turning over her brother's heterogeneous collection of songs and chants, "here is 'Nazareth.' Pray remember that it is a favourite of mine."

Nora never quite understood why this request—declined so quietly and politely—should have put an end to the music; nor how it happened that Mr. Poynz, who had looked so stern during Miss Foster's urgent importunity, should in another minute be moving the piano, and preparing the room for an impromptu dance.

"I'm so glad," whispered Nora to Miss Archer, with a long-drawn breath of relief. "It is so hard to sit quite still to-day."

"You will not sit much more now, dear," said Helen, with a smile; and then at a sign from Miss Foster she took her seat at the piano, and, in correct time, but with an occasional defective chord, played through the opening figure of the Lancers, as a signal to the company.

"Poynz," whispered the young curate, his face radiant after his first dance with Nora, "I want your opinion of Nora's dancing. Of course you saw her. What did you think?"

"Simply," returned Mark, while young Foster was too full of delight to detect the passing glance or tone of disdain, "that Sir John Suckling's idea of the sun upon an Easter day was—not to be despised."

"Shall you ask her for this next dance?"

"She has been claimed already," Mark said, his eyes upon Nora's figure as she softly passed before him.

"Oh! what a pity for you," cried Will, ruefully, "because I could have the next myself."

"Do," said Mark, coolly. "I will not interfere."

"Did you ever see a girl look happier than she does?" asked Will, evidently caring little for his companion's replies, so engrossed was he in watching Nora. "I'm sure she likes Heaton very much; and just think of the difference she will make here for me!"

"When?" inquired Mark, reflectively. And then Will turned to look at him for the first time.

"I declare even yet," he said with a smile, "I hardly know when you are jesting, Poynz. When she is my wife, I mean. Didn't you always know what question I intended to ask Nora to-day? She—she has escaped it once, but she will listen, I hope, before they leave."

"Take my advice for once, Will," counselled Mark. "Let her have this one day as a real schoolgirl's holiday."

"It shall be a better holiday than that. It shall be the best of her life," asserted young Foster; "for it shall prove to her that all her hard work is over."

"Very well," said Mark; "go and take your chance. But (for your own sake I speak this time, old fellow) whatever man proposes marriage to Miss St. George to-night will go home by Weeping Cross."

"I should be very miserable if I thought so," returned Will, without a shade of anxiety in his voice. "You do not yourself think she will refuse me, do you, Poynz? I am not blessed with an extensive income, certainly, but then Nora has not been brought up in wealth and luxury. She would actually not know what to do with riches, I believe if she had them."

"Then you are a fortunate fellow not to have them. You had better make haste if you are going to join this dance."

"You see," continued Will, engrossed as usual in what he wished to say, "she will be quite a little queen in this parish; and I know enough of her to be certain she will help me in doing all the good I can."

"Did you ever read 'Joseph Andrews?'" interpolated Mark, rather chillily.

"I think so; but why?"

"Don't you remember how sensibly Mrs. Adams reminded Mr. Adams that it was blasphemous to talk Scripture out of church?"

"My dear fellow, what do you mean?" questioned Foster, though he comprehended more than he fancied he did, in that cool interruption of his rhapsody.

"That, if you intend to lose this dance, I do not."

In another minute Mark was at Helen Archer's side. But Helen, with her slow rare blush, gently and gratefully declined to give up her task to enjoy that, or even any future dance. And yet after the next Mr. Poynz came up with the same request ; and it was just then that Nora stooped down and laid her hand upon Helen's.

"I know just one valse quite well," she said. "Let me play that through and through, and give you a rest. Mr. Poynz, do persuade her to dance ; they are all enjoying themselves except Helen."

"Indeed I am enjoying myself," she answered them, gently. "I like to play, and, above all things, I like to see your pleasure."

"Miss St. George," said Mark, speaking almost wearily as he watched her pretty, earnest pleading, "if I were to ask you to dance this valse with me—"

"Nora," put in Will, joining her eagerly, "come !"

She glanced for one moment up into Mark's face, as if she consulted him ; but, when he coolly stepped back a little, as if he had no share in either their acts or words, she gave her hand to her old friend, and took her place laughingly in the dance.

"I never saw such real enjoyment," said Miss Archer, speaking low as she turned her eyes back to her music. "Will she enjoy so keenly every pleasure that the world holds, do you think, Mr. Poynz ?"

"I trust so ; as freshly, purely, and unsuspectingly."

"Does she not look beautiful to-day ? What is the charm about her ?"

"The perfect harmony of— Miss Foster, not dancing !" added Mark, his tone changing entirely at Genevieve's silent approach. "Will you turn that extraordinary circumstance into felicity for me ?"

The last dance came presently, then the time for leaving, and Mark and Nora had not danced together. "But," Mark had said to himself, "I have told her what I wished to tell ; and this was Will's day after all."

So Mark's horses came round in the moonlight ; for, though it was decided that the Fosters should return by train from Guildford, Mr. Poynz would drive them thither, and Will was going on to London with them. It was not a silent drive, for Miss Foster was lavish with praise for the skill with which Mark guided his horses in the rather deceptive light ; and Victoria had much to say about the people she had met that day. Yet everyone noticed how still Nora sat, one hand linked in childish fashion within Miss Archer's arm, her eyes very wondering in their gaze upon the lovely moonlit scene, and her thoughts wide and vague and beautiful with indescribable happiness. Helen Archer was very silent too, but that fact struck no one who would remark upon it, and Mrs. Foster was sufficiently wakeful

to strike occasionally the lagging conversational steed with her useful spurs. And, if Mark Poynz sat rather mutely on his seat, Will Foster, from the seat behind, had much to say in his pleasant excitement.

Just once Mark turned to look, as Will struggled manfully (but unsuccessfully) in his efforts to rouse Nora into a colloquial humour. As he turned, Nora's eyes were lifted from the fair calm scene, and met his; and, though the thoughtfulness remained, she smiled as she met his glance.

"I ought to say it too, Mr. Poynz," she said, when they were parting at the station, and she had heard the ladies expressing their unbounded pleasure in the drive, and acknowledging their due sense of indebtedness to him, "and I don't know how, though it has been such a very, very happy day—the happiest I have ever had."

"Such words are the richest thanks a man can wish."

Mark said it quietly, as he took her hand and clasped it for a moment. And then Will came up to hurry her into the railway carriage, and Mark stood back.

A grasp of the hand from Will, with the comforting assurance that the young pastor would return to his flock as soon as Nora had left London; a few beaming smiles, and a dainty hand-waving from Miss Foster; the same from Tory, who came to the front under difficulties; and a gracious nod from Mrs. Foster. Then the train had passed on, and left Mark standing still, his thoughts far in that receding carriage, where Nora sat wrapt in the silence of a happiness which that moonlit drive had deepened and elevated, and which seemed to belong to her as thoroughly as the joyous happiness of the day, because in each there was, as Mark had said, such perfect harmony.

"I think," remarked Miss Foster, moodily, as she settled herself far back into her corner, and let out a little of her suppressed disappointment, "it was stiff and disagreeable of Mr. Poynz not to ask us to his own house."

Will's laugh burst out merrily.

"You must have dined with his horses then, Jenny. He keeps up an establishment for no one else down there."

CHAPTER XXI.

Sorrow ends not when it seemeth done.

Richard III.

IT was the day after Nora's return to Ireland, and she and Celia Pennington (the younger children following them in a bevy, for Nat and Tom were at Portora now) had been wandering about the house and garden in the happiest, idlest way.

And yet, from the first hour of her return, Nora had been conscious of a *something* between herself and Celia which had never been between them before; the very thinnest, vaguest cloud it was, yet a cloud which Nora could not dispel, and the source of which she never guessed; for who was to tell her that Nuel Armstrong, through his friendly intercourse at the Vicarage, had daintily sown seeds of suspicion and distrust, which should ripen and serve his own purpose. Such tiny seeds, and so gradually and skilfully sown, that Celia never suspected their presence, and only very slowly grew to feel sorry that Nora was, during her stay in England, changing into a heartless girl, who would scorn the old Irish life and so-called pleasures. And, now that Nora was with her, the idea was too firmly rooted to be thrown aside; while all the time Nora, revelling in a new, delightful holiday, told herself again and again—and tried to believe it—that it was only a wrong and ungrateful fancy of hers that Celia was changed, and that life at the Vicarage was not so all-satisfying and so utterly cloudless as she had used to feel it must be.

In the earliest dawn of that day Nora had been to Traveere, wandering about the rooms with Kitty, and seeing that, though they were made habitable, there had been no attempt to beautify them. Then she and Breen and Kitty had breakfasted together in a festive manner, and she had run back to the Vicarage in time to wake Celia from her first sleep. The whole forenoon had been spent by the two girls in the village, on parish errands; and, now that the early dinner was over, Nora had put on her hat and was going to see Rachel Corr, and have a long afternoon chat with her—"if Rachel will spare the time," she added simply, to Celia, who had come in now, and sat at the window, wondering how Nora could have spent a year in London, and yet have so few fashionable things to exhibit to her.

"Considering how anxious Mrs. Corr has always been for any atom of news of you, Nora," she observed, "I should think she would like to spare a whole week to chat with you, as you say."

"But I couldn't spare it, could I?" smiled Nora. "I must begin to work in earnest after to-day. Mr. Pennington advises an advertisement, Celia."

"Nora," interposed Celia, thoughtfully, making no pretence to follow a subject which did not occupy her own thoughts, "did Mr. Foster travel with you at all from England?"

"Oh, no! Nuel fetched me, you know, commissioned by Mr. Doyle. Why should Mr. Foster have come?"

"Doctor Armstrong had told me he would. Will he come up to see Mr. Poynz, do you think?"

"Mr. Poynz? Is he———Oh, I remember he said he should come to Traveere, perhaps! I wonder whether he will."

"We have just heard that he is there, but papa doesn't believe

it, so he is going to send a note over. Were the Fosters sorry to part with you, Nora?"

"Very—*very*. I don't think either of them will enjoy life any more. Their sun has set."

"You mean the girls!" laughed Celia, watching the merry, sensitive mouth, and struck by its beauty now as if she had never seen it before. "Wasn't their mother kinder to you?"

"Yes."

"And Will? It was hardest, I suppose, to part from him?"

"No; it was hardest to part from Miss Archer. Don't Celia—I am not joking. She was *very* kind to me; and one reason why I am going to work so hard, is that I may repay her. Listen! You are called."

At the Vicarage-gate the children—who had clung to Nora's side—were taken back by Celia, and Nora went on across the bog alone; singing softly to herself as in old times, and feeling as if those long twelve months in London must have been a dream. from which she had awakened back to the old, unbroken life.

It will feel even more so presently," she said, the last notes of her song melting into an involuntary sigh, "for Nuel said he should be back again to-day; he is so *very* much a part of my old life."

The sound of a swift, light step, which, though almost noiseless on the turf, struck familiarly on Nora's ear, made her stop and turn; and then a warm, kind smile beamed in her beautiful eyes, and she stooped to bring her head on a level with the shaggy head of the bare-footed child who, in one nondescript garment just twice too big for him, was hurrying after her.

"Why, Larry," she said, drawing her head back in a critical, admiring sort of way, as she took both the lad's rough hands into her own, "what a big boy you are growing!"

"Stap, Miss Nora!" he cried, in real fright, as he unclenched the fingers of one hand, and showed a letter, crushed and soiled. "Take it plase; I be's to rin now' an' niver stap!"

Before Nora had time to question him, the child was speeding out of sight across the bog, and so, smiling as she stood, she opened the soiled envelope, and drew a slip of paper from it. Could Larry's drunken father have learnt to *write* during that year she had been away? Or could Larry himself have scribbled her a line to show his progress? These thoughts were only momentary, for she had not stood two minutes there before the paper was hidden in her dress, and she was walking back towards the Vicarage, steadfast in purpose, though so sadly deep in thought. For the few lines were from Rachel Corr, and this was what they said—

"As I guess that you will soon be coming to see me, Miss Nora dear, I shall put Larry to watch until he can give this into your own hand, and then not wait a moment for fear he

should be seen. Miss Nora, for the sake of all that love you, don't come here at all to-day! But I must see you as soon as I can do it safely. I must speak to you where *no one* can see us or hear us. I will be at Larry's cottage by the river at dusk. Will you go there alone—quite alone? If you fail, this night will ruin us all; but, even if you come, what can we do? Oh! how hard it is for me to be the one to make you miserable! But I don't know what to do, Miss Nora dear. I must tell it all to you—and even then what can we do? Burn this quickly.

“RACHEL.

“In the dark to-night. Oh! don't forget.”

CHAPTER XXII.

Love gave her courage, love exiled fear,
 Love to her tired limbs new vigour lent,
 Till she approached where the Squire abode.

TASSO

A low, ungainly cabin, inclining feebly back towards the stony mud from which (just twenty years ago, between one sunset and sunrise) it was formed clumsily by the hands of the squatter. An awkward, dejected building, which looked as if it resented the power those two crooked poles possessed to keep its leaning form a little longer in the similitude of a habitation, and longed for the opportunity to crumble—in utter exhaustion—back into a heap of clods and stones from which nothing would be expected in the shape of shelter and comfort. Between the door and a stagnant pond of impure water, one faded elderly duck, without a feather on her head, was roosting wearily; and, beyond the water, a little lad stood wrapped in infinite delight, both his dirty hands full of barley-sugar, and his cheeks and lips shining with its traces. It was dusk even out upon the unsheltered level, yet little Larry Hogan could see for half a mile along the river-path. But the gloom of the miserable cabin within hurried the darkness of night, and the woman who stood alone there waiting, could discern little of the squalid scene around her. She walked restlessly up and down upon the rough mud floor, and the famishing chickens—whose hope had filtered from them through many neglected generations—let her pass by unworried. Then, when she was quite tired, she paused at the window, with her head against the wall, and her hands upon her eyes, waiting for Nora—for the small square aperture which once had been a window was so successfully patched with bits of cloth and paper that Rachel felt as safe from observation there as she had been farther within the darkening cabin. Surely, surely it was dark enough now for Miss Nora to come! Yet suppose she should come too soon and be seen! Ah, no! She was always quick to understand, and she would never fail in any trust or promise.

There was a step at last, a running step, which passed the window and halted at the door, returning as fast as it had come; but Rachel knew that Larry had pushed open the door for some one to enter, and so she dropped her hands, knowing that the light was fading fast, and that she had no time to lose.

Coming, even from the dark without, into the darker room, Nora could for a few minutes distinguish nothing; but Rachel's eyes had been covered, and were accustomed to the gloom now, so she could see Nora's face, and, seeing it, she stood quite still, and made no step to meet the one for whom she had watched so anxiously for a whole hour. For Rachel was conscious, even in this sudden meeting, of a change which the year's absence had made in Nora; and, vague as it was, she tried to grasp and comprehend it before she spoke. But she failed, for the difference was too subtle to be traced through the old, glad, simple greeting which came so naturally from Nora's lips when she saw Mrs. Corr.

"Don't look sorry to see me, Rachel," she pleaded then, just in the old wistful way. "I have been so looking forward to seeing you. I was on my way this afternoon when Larry met me with your note. It—it frightened me a little, Rachel; but surely nothing has happened which could make you sorry to see me?"

"Miss Nora"—Rachel had eagerly received and returned the girl's kiss and caress; but now she had turned away, and was once more pacing the rugged ground, with her head bent and her hands clasped—"don't speak of that; don't remind me how long you've been away, and that *this* is how I meet and welcome you at last. My dear, my dear, don't talk of that. Talk of—How dark it gets! It seems as if the night were flying to meet us. Miss Nora, open the door again. I—cannot breathe!"

"Rachel," said the girl gently, as she opened the cabin-door a little wider, "tell me what the trouble is. I have been for hours preparing myself, and you will feel better after you have told it—even only to me."

"But how can I tell?"—Quite suddenly Rachel's words were broken off, as well as her hurried walk, and she stood with her head lifted as if listening for a sound without. Then, just as suddenly, she resumed her hasty walk, and spoke quickly, but almost below her breath.

"I *must* tell it. Not because it will do me good, or because you are the one who ought to hear it, dear—on this first day you are among us again—but because I can tell no one else. I dare not. Even to yourself, Miss Nora, it may prove to have been the cruellest thing to tell. It is too late, too. How dark it grows! Miss Nora, can you understand me?"

"Not yet," said Nora, her tone very quiet and pitiful, but her eyes clear and fearless, as she stood leaning against the smoky

chimney, trying hard to follow Rachel's meaning. Is it about Shan?"

The question was interrupted by a cry from Mrs. Corr, and then the words seemed literally to totter from her lips.

"Yes, about Shan, Miss Nora. I—I cannot break it to you as I meant. It's about Shan. He has sworn an oath that to-night—at dark—he will shoot—Mr. Poynz—at Traveere!"

The woman's face was covered in the gloom; but Nora still stood looking at her, waiting for the meaning of her words to shine out of this awful mist, thought itself suspended in that momentary hush.

"That's what I had to tell, Miss Nora!" cried Rachel, breaking the silence sharply in her torture. "You understand it now—my misery, I mean—for—oh, I pray God the misery is *only* mine."

"To-night—in the darkness?" questioned Nora, pushing the hair from her white face, and looking with a straight, direct gaze throughout the open doorway as she approached it.

"Miss Nora," cried Rachel, hastily intercepting her, "where are you going? Oh, my dear, don't let what I have told you make you rash, and put your own life in danger! Tell me where you are going."

"To Traveere," said Nora, a terrible bewilderment in her low, intense tones, though the two words were so clear and so distinct.

"Not yet," pleaded Rachel, nervously; "wait and think. Let us try to think what is wise. You will see the best, for I have tried, and tried in vain—for hours; but I must help you too, because I know it all. You would go to warn Mr. Poynz. Miss Nora, if *that* would save him, *I* could have done it; but—but listen!"

The anguish in the woman's voice grew more and more acute while she spoke, and Nora took her hand pityingly as they stood; but the girl did not move away from the open door, and she was still looking beyond it, towards where her old home lay in the darkness, nearly a mile away.

"Think Miss Nora—try to think, and see it all as clearly as you can, and I—I will try to show you. And then—but *how* can we two prevent it, except to make Shan more desperate than he is, and more bent upon the—the crime—which he must have been plotting for so long?"

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Rachel, really frightened by the girl's unnatural calmness. "Heaven only knows, Miss Nora, why it is, but he has hated the English gentleman from the first—doubly hated him when he took Micky away; and—and I think something else must have happened, too, that I never heard of—at the time of—your grandfather's death. He wouldn't pay his rent; and, though I've saved it at last, Mr. Doyle wouldn't take it from me. All this year Shan has been getting worse and

worse, though I would not have thought, even a year ago, that he *could* be worse than he was. He's belonging now to the wildest and wickedest set in Ireland, and they would none of them be afraid of the worst crime on earth. They know they can frighten even the police; they have got safe hiding-places, and can help each other. Oh, my dear, don't go! What can you do? What can we do? If we warned Mr. Poynz, it would make *him* angry and daring, and make Shan all the more determined to do effectually to-morrow what he might possibly be prevented doing to-day. I knew that, or I should have gone to Traveere myself hours ago; I knew too, that then Shan would—would have had"—the woman's voice sank to a miserable whisper now—"my own life to answer for as well as the stranger's—the life of his father's wife. For I know him far too well to think that anything *I* could do would have any effect but that of maddening him against two instead of one; and, Miss Nora, do you think I would let you venture?"

"Shan shall never suspect me," said Nora, clearly and quietly, "and above all, he can never suspect you. Would it not be the safest for you to hurry home? Suppose he missed and traced you?"

"He was out," whispered Rachel; "not to return to-night. It was for that I waited. While he was at home I could not venture beyond the cottage door; and even now I dare not go near Traveere or Kilver; nor could I let you be seen going anywhere where I might be. Oh, my dear, what a day this has been—worse than—worse than one other day of horror which I can remember many years ago!"

"You will hurry home, Rachel," entreated Nora, earnestly, as for the first time in her life she felt the awful atmosphere of crime surrounding herself. "You will hurry home for—all our sakes. I am going on to Traveere."

"Miss Nora," cried Rachel, sharply, "you—you must not warn Mr. Poynz. He would try to seize Shan, and—and there would be *murder* even more surely than if he was shot through his own window. And, if you tempted Mr. Poynz away, would not Shan suspect and meet him? If you took others to help, it would be worse, as Shan has far more help ready, and all this would only make him more desperate. Ah! shouldn't I have done *that*—if it had been possible—without telling you? My dear, you cannot stay it. God help us! Shan will be lying among the trees in the avenue to-night, as soon as it is utterly dark, and from there he will shoot into the sitting-room—oh! wait, wait till I tell you—horrible as it is to say, I must tell you all—through the window, for Mr. Poynz will sit there, and must have a light, and—and you know how unprotected all the windows are, and how easily Shan——"

"Where is Dr. Armstrong, Rachel?"

"In Enniskillen to-day," whispered Mrs. Corr, her breath failing her now, and every syllable an effort. "He comes to Traveere to-night with Mr. Doyle, and by that time—it will be late in the night—it will be over. Oh, Miss Nora, if we could save him till then! But how can I let you go? It—it was only through such a wonderful chance that I heard his terrible plan, which has been made for months, and only waiting an opportunity. I—— No, no, my dear, I will not keep you to tell you *that*. It is enough that I heard and discovered it. That very hour I sent to warn you; and the day has seemed a year to me—*this* day, which I had looked forward to so long, when I was to see you again."

"And I," said Nora, wistfully, "was so happy just when I met Larry, for I was coming to spend hours with you, Rachel, and tell you good things of Micky. Now," she went on gently drawing her fingers from Mrs. Corr's, "give me a kiss, and—pray for —us."

"Oh, Miss Nora, stop!"

But something in Nora's manner stifled this timid entreaty, and the poor scared, panic-stricken woman, whose alarm was twofold, stood back and owned the wiser decision of the girl whose purpose was so single.

Little Larry Hogan, dirty and ragged, stood just in Nora's way as she ran down to the river-path; but, though she spoke to him, and put something into his sticky hand, she did not pause a second. Rapidly now the darkness was settling like a cloud upon the bog, and Nora was grateful in her heart for its concealment, even in spite of that other remembrance of what else it was to hide. The way was so familiar to her that no light was needed for a guide, and the swift footsteps never paused nor diverged. It was just beside the fallen pine—where a year ago Will Foster and Mark had found her—that she turned from the river, and ran straight across the pathless fields towards Traveere.

"He has sworn an oath that to-night at dark he will shoot Mr Poyuz at Traveere."

If it would but rain, she thought, as she caught sight of the dim outlines of the old house. If it would but rain, that she might seek shelter there boldly and naturally! But there fell no kindly drops through the heavy night air; nor could it cool her fevered lips as she sped through it.

She could not see the window of the familiar sitting-room, as she crept noiselessly up to the kitchen door; but—as clearly as it could have been in reality—did she see in imagination that lighted square of bare, unshuttered glass beyond which Mr. Poyuz sat, unconscious of the weapon to be pointed so surely in the darkness outside. Had she not often and often heard how cleverly Shan Corr could shoot, and how constantly he practised,

as if he ~~never~~ could be perfect enough? And did she not know exactly how quiet Mr. Poynz could be for long minutes at a time, while—— The thought died shudderingly, and, with fingers hurried and nervous (though they were so quiet) Nora turned the handle of the kitchen door. For a moment she paused then, for old Kitty sat alone before the low turf-fire, and in that moment it seemed to Nora as if she must be going up to her as in the old times, frankly to tell her plans and her perplexities to this sole confidante of hers. But just as Kitty turned, with the vague consciousness of a presence in the room, Nora remembered, clearly and distinctly, all that she must leave unsaid.

"Saints be good to us!" cried Kitty, knocking over her stool as she rose to her feet. "Is it yerself, Miss Norah, an' be yerself alone, an' no purrson wid ye this hour o' the night! The tinder heart o' ye come to see th' owid place agin! An' it's meself wurr thinkin' o' ye thin, an' ye've shockened me now at all, fur I be's oulder thin I used to be, me dear, an' it gives a burstin' o' me heart to see ye so suddinlike, an' 'thout suspectin' ye. Come up to the fire, doaty, furr it's just starrvin' ye look. Mother o' mortals, it wurn't that weh ye wurr lookin' whin ye parted from Ireland, as whitesome and as icksome as a sowl in Purgory, niver a wid-wurrd to spake to, whin ould Kitty hearkened vainfully for twalve month gone iver an' alwis fur the voice of ye! Didn't I know it wurr disimproovin' ye to kape ye over the wide say intirely? Stap a minute, doaty. Whurr be's ye goin', so cowl'd an' stiff as y' are?"

"To Mr. Poynz," said Nora, as she crossed the kitchen. "Is he in the sitting-room, Kitty, and no one with him?"

"No purrson, barr'n Bran, me dear," returned the old woman, pondering Nora's words and manner: "on'y Bran, th' ould laze, lyin' iver an' alwis afore the fire, jist whither thurrs be's one or no. Miss Nora doaty, what is it y're wantin' wid the gentleman?"

"A message, Kitty. What is he doing?"

"Writin', me dear. It's all this blissed day sin' tay-time he's bin at it. 'Dade but it's yerself that's quare intirely, wantin' to go in to him, an' I jist affther lightin' candles an' shuttin' up fur the night, on'y there ben't nothin' to shut; an' why he come it's harrd to know, an' I thought it quare. But now, saints forgive ye! it's yerself that's quarer, Miss Nora dear. That I should live to see this blissed day an' yer sowl so throubled. Glory to——"

While she spoke, Kitty had been following Nora from the kitchen and across the hall; but what was the use of finishing her sentence? Miss Nora evidently heard nothing of it, and only looked round just for one moment to give her a smile before opening the door and then went on into the silent room. No, it

was of no use worrying and talking over it to her; so Kitty went back to her kitchen, and muttered to herself, while she was busy in making a cup of tea for Miss Nora—and for herself, of course, at the same time—feeling it a panacea for every hurt and sorrow.

“Bliss her, she shan’t go out agin into the couldness ’thout somethin’ to s’port her. Isn’t it meself knows how plased she’ll be to see it riddy whin she comes back agin through here, fur manny’s the toime she’s thried to wheedle a faste out o’ me, whin I’ve had the harrd work to git the bit an’ sup for the ginerall males.”

But while the tea grew stronger and stronger upon the stone hearth, the old woman, in her solitude, slept with her head on the settle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The quick flames rise, the quick flames fall,
 But the core of the fire, like a heart, beats bright.
 My fancies rise, and my fancies fall,
 But my heart beats time to the fire-core white.

The Wife's Sorrow.

A PLEASANT turf-fire glowed and flamed in the dingy sitting-room at Traveere, and near it (almost exactly between it and the open window) Mr. Poynz sat writing at the unsteady old table, on which two lighted candles stood. Never had there been such a blaze of light in the gloomy room, either through Colonel St. George's occupation of Traveere, or since his death—never until this night, when the light was to guide the murderer.

Mark had turned aside from the table, and had his pen idle in his hand, when the door was quietly opened, and Nora came in—came in just as if it were a natural thing for her to visit him alone, after darkness had fallen on the world without. But, though her ease was so pretty, he could see that she only maintained it by a great effort, and that her face was white and her eyes troubled, as he had seen them only once before. With a great gladness in his eyes, he had risen in the first moment; but the gladness rapidly gave way to apprehension.

“I’m—please don’t ask me what is the matter, Mr. Poynz,” Nora said, hurrying over the words when she saw what question was on his lips. “Everyone is well at the Vicarage—I am quite well—nothing has happened. Please understand all that, and don’t question me to-night. I—am come to pay you a call. I have called upon you—isn’t that the right expression in society? Please say you are glad to see me.”

“I am *very* glad to see you,” Mark said, doing his best to hide his surprise, and pretending not to see the shy, pained colour that had rushed into her face. “I was only beginning to wish that I

had made Traveere more comfortable. This is the first evening I have spent here. But I am expecting Doyle to-night; and he must have been detained, for I sent to summon him long ago. I wish to see him here, else I should probably have been at the Vicarage or Fintona to-night. I am at your service, Miss St. George. I will go home with you whenever you wish.'

"Thank you," she returned, simply. "I will tell you when I am ready. They don't know I am here, unless they guess. I would like to see Mr. Doyle. I cannot tell you why I came—until to-morrow; but you trust me, don't you?"

"Trust you!" he echoed, his warm eyes full of amusement as well as of utter confidence in her. "I should—no, I will be like yourself, and tell you *to-morrow*. Wait, Miss St. George, and let me close it."

This he added because she glanced towards the open window and shivered a little.

"No—no, please," she said, as she intercepted him. "I like to do it. I could fancy," she went on, without lowering her voice, as she stood alone in the narrow aperture, "that I was living here still with grandpa. It is just as quiet as it used to be. No one ever used to come to Traveere—after dark."

"Not even Dr. Armstrong?" questioned Mark, lightly, though he was wondering why she made it impossible for him to stand beside her at the window, and look out with her into the darkness. "Come to the fire, Miss St. George, you have grown chilly."

"Yes," she said, turning readily. "If you will lead the way, I will follow."

He laughed quite heartily then, as he crossed the room to the hearth; but, when she *literally* followed him, and stood beside him there—still between him and the unshuttered window—a vague, uneasy feeling grew upon him that something must be amiss with her. Could she be suffering from any nervous girlish attack, the result of her return to the old scenes of her lonely youth? Could her paleness and excitement be the precursors of a serious illness? He checked the thought in real self-pity, but he could not so quickly change the watchfulness and anxiety of his gaze; and Nora raised her eyes just then, and read it.

"Mr. Poyntz," she said, without any hesitation, though she did not know herself what words she was going to utter, "will you please allow me, for just this one evening, to fancy myself at home here again, doing as I like, and going where I like? And will you do as I ask you—just this once?"

"You are sure you will claim the privilege only *just this once*?" he asked, trying to decide that some unexpected trouble or pain had upset her, but failing to do so when he met the frank, entreating glance. "Then I think I may safely promise. Will you stir the fire, Miss St. George? You understand a turf-fire a much better than I do."

"Thank you," she said, not for that proposal, but because she saw now that he would understand, and not question or doubt her. "It is very dark, isn't it? Did you notice how *suddenly* it grew dark to-night?"

"No; but then I have been sitting here all the evening, so the twilight seemed long to me. I remember looking out and thinking with Moore that 'evening lingered in heaven.'"

"Oh, no!" said Nora, in simple surprise. "The night came all at once, like the sudden unfolding of two great black wings between us and heaven. I have never seen it so before."

"He is not well to-day, poor fellow," observed Mark, presently, looking down upon the old sheep-dog, and marvelling to see that, though Nora was looking at him too—wistfully, and even tenderly—she would not stoop from her upright position to bestow a touch or a caress.

"I must give you a glass of wine," said Mark, suddenly moving to the table; but his hand was unsteady as he poured it, for Nora had walked with him there, and stood again at his side.

She took the wine and drank a little of it obediently; but when he said he would put a chair for her beside the fire, she stopped him—though speaking still just in her own pretty, gentle tone—for he must not think her ill or requiring care; he must not try to bestow on *her* the protection she longed to give.

"Yes, I will sit down,, Mr. Poynz. Of course I must take a seat, as I am paying you a call. Please be very entertaining. You were writing, weren't you, when I came in? Then would you mind lending me a book—this one upon the table, please—to read while you go on with your writing?"

"Is that what you wish?" asked Mark, cleverly once again hiding his surprise. "Then where will you sit?"

As he carried the chair, she walked with him up to the seat he had been occupying all the evening, and, with her back to the window, directed him, laughingly, how to place hers; and, when he had done her bidding, smiling a little himself too, she sat down on her high, uncomfortable chair, in the direct line from the window; while he sat writing busily beyond her, preoccupied by his work, as it seemed to her. And beyond the unshuttered window—against which the darkness lay like a sable curtain, and towards which Nora tried never once to glance—Shan Corr crouched, with his loaded rifle against his shoulder, waiting just for that clear aim which should make a second's work effectual.

Once Mark put down his pen and rose to replenish the fire, but the moment he did so Nora uttered a little exclamation of delight, and came up eagerly to show him a passage in her book. As she read it to him, standing close beside him, he watched her

with a scrutiny which was almost painful; but no suspicion could live in her presence, and no mystery in her coming could, after all, make her companionship anything but a joy to him.

"I suppose, Miss St. George," he said, in his cool, easy tones, as he took his seat once more, and she took hers with an unconscious sigh of relief, "that the year you spent in England seems almost like a dream to you, now you are at home again? How little I saw you during that long year! Are you and I to——" He corrected himself bravely—too thorough a gentleman to take advantage of the quiet hours she had voluntarily given him, and knowing her too well to believe that this was a motiveless and idle visit. Had she not told him, too, that she would explain it on the morrow?

"And now I shall begin to teach at once, when I've found some children to teach," she said, simply. "Celia says it will be a very dull and wearying life—unless I chance to travel."

"Travel as a governess? What infinite delight the plan unfolds! My child, be content with the pleasant journeys you take in your loneliest moments, until—— And you have quite decided to be a governess, have you?" he added, with an entire change of tone. "That's right, for I know a man who would love to have his children taught by you."

"Not—really?" questioned Nora. "Oh, I wish he would engage me at once!"

"He is ready. Do you know I have had the hardest work in the world, for a whole year, to prevent his trying to engage you before you might think yourself ready? I often feared that he would do it in spite of me."

"I'm not very ready even now," said Nora, sadly, her eyes turning swiftly to the window because Mark at that moment bent forward in his seat. "I don't know many things, but I should try to be kind, and help this gentleman's children; though I never could be so kind as Miss Archer was to me."

"Never. You are far too full of faults, or—as Pope cautiously puts it—of female errors. But never mind; he himself reminds us we have a remedy."

"How?"

"He says—

If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face and you'll forget 'em all.

"I should like that," said Nora, reflectively. "It's so disappointing to be constantly reminded of one's errors. As if one *could* oneself ever possibly forget them!"

"Perhaps you might. Some people do."

"Has Miss Foster female errors, do you think?"

"Just possible. But then, you see, I 'looked on her face, and so, of course, I 'forgot 'em all.'"

"If you had properly forgotten them, you would at once have said 'No, she hasn't any,'" laughed Nora.

"I see. I am growing very much accustomed now to a plump descent into Charbydis. My—— My child, what is it?"

"Did I frighten you?" asked Nora, her lips smiling, though they were ashy-white, and her wide eyes fixed upon the window, where the firelight darted to and fro upon the bare black panes, "I am very sorry. No, no, please don't go. I daresay Bran stirred upon the hearth and startled me. Please sit here still, Mr. Poynz; I—I want you to read me these few pages. Please do—just in your old attitude."

So, wondering a good deal, he remained as she wished, and read on and on at her request; while she still sat, in apparent ease and interest, between him and the murderer, whose patience now was ebbing fast.

CHAPTER XXIV.

O night, when good men rest and infants sleep!

JOANNA BAILLIE.

A SUPPER of cold lamb and salad does not easily spoil by being kept, else would not Mrs. Pennington's occasional glances at the dining-table have been so serene, while she sat sewing beside her own little work-table. Nor would there have been such placidity in the queries she addressed to her daughter, when at last Celia entered the dining-room, complaining with a sigh, that the practice with the choir had never seemed so long to her before.

"That," remarked the Vicar's wife, "is because you were in haste to be free again, my dear. Of course you naturally enjoy being with Nora, but you must not let the enjoyment interfere with your duties."

"But, mother," queried Celia, having evidently little heeded her mother's advice, "where *is* Nora? You ought to have sent her to help us when she came in."

"Sent her to you! Why, surely she has been with you all the time?"

"No. Don't you remember she told us she had decided to delay her visit to Rachel Corr till night?"

"How silly!" murmured Mrs. Pennington, handing her needle for Celia to thread.

"Yes, but she would go. Mother, don't you think some one had better fetch her?"

"Very unnecessary, dear," returned Mrs. Pennington, carefully fastening in her thread. "Rachel will see her safely here; but Nora certainly should not have stayed so long."

"It is a whole year since they saw each other," explained

Celia, in her practical motherly way. "And Nora will have much to tell Rachel. I will just see whether papa feels inclined for a walk to Mrs. Corr's."

It was so impossible for Celia to hide any of her feelings that the mother plainly saw her anxiety, and she smiled a little.

"You forget how at home Nora is here at Kilver as well as on the bog, Celia. And yet I am quite sure Rachel would never leave her to walk back alone in the dark. Just take this seam and finish it for me."

Stifling her impatience, Celia sat down beside the lamp, and worked quickly, that she might the sooner be released. If Nat and Tom had been at home they would have run off for Nora long ago. The seam was a long one, and Celia's needle, rapid as it was, took a considerable time in travelling from end to end: so that when, at last, she cut off her thread, she had let her uneasiness grow to unnatural proportions, and her sudden and impetuous opening of the study-door startled the good Vicar into the consciousness that he had been an hour asleep over his sermon, and had let the supper-hour pass undisturbed.

"Nonsense," he said when he had listened to Celia's suggestion of a night stroll to Rachel's cottage. "Where is my little daughter's common sense? Nora was Mrs. Corr's nurseling once upon a time—her pet always—and Rachel would be extremely hurt if she fancied we would not trust her to see Nora home. They must be having a long chat together, must they not? Surely supper is ready, and your mother out of patience. Well, dear, another day is gone, you see, and I'm thankful to feel its work is done."

But the Vicar was only listening to the flattering tale of Hope when he fancied his day's work was over. Before he had even finished his favourite meal—a meal he hated to forego for the benefit of a rare dinner-guest—a summons came to him from an old woman who lived quite a mile from the village, and who sent him the startling intelligence that she was "dyin' intirely."

"She is very often *dyin' intirely*," muttered Mr. Pennington, impatiently, as he put on the overcoat Celia held for him; "and, if a doctor were obtainable, I would think twice before going. But, if I don't go and dose her, and remind her how often she has recovered from an attack of *dyin' intirely*, she will invite all those people about her to her own wake—the force of despondency could no further go, could it, Celia? What a dejected expression, my dear! What is it? Oh, I recollect! Nora's long gossip with the Corrs. Of course she will be here directly."

"You will call round for her, papa, won't you?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; though Rachel will laugh at me, and say she saw Miss Nora safely home long ago."

Mrs. Pennington, for about an hour after her husband's departure, made a feeble struggle against her overwhelming sleepiness,

but gave in bravely at last, and sought her pillow; murmuring a few words, half reproachfully, and half in astonishment, about, Nora's curious conduct. For hours the little household—all save Miss Pennington and the stable-boy—had been fast asleep, when the Vicar's familiar knock made Celia start up, with every pulse throbbing.

"Oh! papa," she cried, almost before she had opened the door, "I have been so terrified! I have never spent such a night before. Isn't it dark? Come in—come in quickly. Nora, you have so frightened me! Did you wait on purpose to frighten me?"

"Nora!" ejaculated the Vicar, in astonishment, as he came into the little hall. "Why are you speaking to Nora? Surely she is in bed and asleep?"

"Oh, papa, she has never come!"

Mr. Pennington looked down for a few moments into his daughter's face, simply puzzled; and then either the fear he saw there, or his own sudden change of thought, made his face and voice and manner different.

"I have seen Rachel Corr," he said. "She was nursing and helping old Biddy; though, by the way, she looks terribly ill herself, and far more in need of nursing. She told me Nora left her before it was thoroughly dark. I felt quite satisfied then that she would be here with you, though she might, in her old careless way, have wandered before returning. But now—I don't know what to think."

"Perhaps," suggested Celia, grasping at anything that was not danger for Nora, "she is at Traveere."

"Most unlikely, for Mr. Poyntz is there, you know. But—well, if you think that most likely, I will go and see. I cannot myself think of anything wiser to do. What is it, dear? Coming with me? Nonsense! You will be frightened by the darkness? Well, well, child, don't cry; come along, if you insist on it. I only warn you it is the blackest night I ever was out in; and, if you are alarmed——"

"I shall be a hundred times more alarmed here!" sobbed Celia, wrapping a shawl about her. "I cannot bear another waiting like this. Will you take a lantern, father?"

"No," said the Vicar, opening the hall-door again, and peering out into the dense darkness; "we can keep to the road by instinct. And we shall be far quicker—and safer too—without the lantern. Now are you ready, dear?"

The boy was called from the kitchen, and entrusted with a message for his mistress, if she called to question anyone. Then Celia clung tightly to her father's arm, and the two went cautiously out through the garden-gate.

Two long Irish miles lay between the Vicarage and Traveere; and, though the two houses had seemed quite near together when

Celia had been strolling between them with Nora before their parting, in old days, the road seemed on this night to stretch wearily into a distant county, and twenty times at least the girl turned in the darkness to question her father, in real and piteous alarm.

"Have we lost our way, father? Aren't we on the high road, going on to Fintona? Oh, please don't let us waste time!"

"Here we are," said the Vicar at last, his own relief evident in his tones; "this is the Traveere avenue. Isn't the darkness almost solid? Keep up, dear; we shall find the door presently, and then—— But I see no prospect of Nora being here. What on earth should bring her here? And, above all, what should *keep* here here, even if she had come? I'm afraid Mr. Poyntz will feel very angry at our disturbing him in the middle of the night; luckily it is the only night he ever has spent at Traveere. Wretched old place!" added the Vicar, wrathfully, as he stumbled on towards the house; "Mr. Poyntz had far better have accepted our invitation and stayed with us. Take care; walk as steadily as you can, dear, for pity's sake!"

"How silent it is here!" whispered Celia, a little awfully. "I couldn't fancy it holding Nora to-night. Oh, papa, suppose we don't find her even here! Look, look!" she cried, with a sudden change of tone. "There's a light! That is the sitting-room, isn't it? What a beautiful bright light! Oh, how thankful I am! Let us go up and look in. How nice it will be to see Nora there safe!"

"Celia," whispered the Vicar, holding his daughter back—and she could not tell whether his voice was stirred by anger or fear—"you will not glance *uninvited* into any man's private room? What made you start? Ah!"

They had stopped suddenly; and it was well the darkness hid her father's face from poor little trembling Celia.

"It was—— There are wheels," said Mr. Pennington at last, his head raised in the darkness, as he listened intently. "And yet I thought it was a step among the trees close to us."

"Papa," whispered Celia, clinging to him, "I saw—where the light from the window falls—something move. Oh, make haste, make haste!"

The wheels too, coming now so swiftly behind them, forced them to hurry; so it was just as they reached the ridge of light which shone from the one uncurtained window, that the two gentlemen in the gig behind them saw the darkly-outlined figures, and shouted to them.

Before the call had died into silence, the lightened window was thrown open, and Nora herself stood looking out; upright in the narrow opening, with one hand on either frame of the window, as if she kept some one back while she stood facing those who must have alarmed her.

"Nora—oh, Nora," cried Celia, springing forward, "we have been so frightened! But you are safe, and I don't care now. What are you looking for beyond? It's Dr. Armstrong; I know his voice. Did you know I was here, that you came so quickly and stood to be the first to meet us, while Mr. Poynz could not— Oh, Nora!"

Celia had paused, and then uttered a hasty exclamation; for, without a word in answer, Nora had slipped to the ground, and now her face was hidden as she knelt, and she was motionless as the dead.

For many years the Vicar of Kilver had entertained a shrewd but secret suspicion that Dr. Armstrong's silence and suavity might conceal a little of the pitiless ferocity that sometimes underlies a passionate and selfish nature; but never had he deemed it possible that he should see such fierce, half-smothered passion exhibited as in that minute when they all entered the lighted sitting-room at Traveere, without having waited for a word of invitation to do so.

At the first sound of Nuel Armstrong's excited voice, Nora lifted her head and rose, a tremor, either of fear or of fully returning consciousness passing through her as she did so.

"Nuel," she said, with a great weariness in the tones that had been all night so clear and natural, "I want to tell you——"

The words broke into a cry of real fear when she saw his face, and with her hands upon her temples, she leaned back against the window-frame, trembling violently, now that the long tension was over.

"Oh, Nora," cried Celia, running to her, "what is the matter, dear? I have never seen you this way before to-night."

"Because before to-night," said Dr. Armstrong, literally hissing the words at Mark, over the head of the meek little Vicar, as Mr. Poynz poured out a glass of wine for Nora, but put it down immediately on seeing Kitty enter with a cup of tea, "she has never been put into such a position. Doyle, this Englishman's conduct shall be explained in a court of justice."

"I am glad to hear it," observed Mark, just glancing at the physician for a moment with easy contempt, as he gave the tea for Nora into Celia's ready hands; "because in his own house the Englishman's conduct will not be explained at all."

"I can explain in a moment," said Nora, pushing the thick soft hair from her face. "I was by the river—quite by the river, Mr. Pennington; and it had grown dark—so dark, Celia; and I—was frightened. I never was frightened in my life as I was frightened then. I—it came so natural to me to run here. It was like going home, almost. And I felt safe here. Nuel, I begged to stay; I couldn't—indeed, indeed I couldn't go out again as long as the darkness lasted. I begged Mr. Poynz to keep me. I—— Nuel how *dare* you look as if I told a falsehood to you?"

The brief outbreak of passion was almost terrible in its sudden intensity as the girl's wide dark eyes flashed their scornful gaze into Dr. Armstrong's.

"I shall explain"—her voice was low and tired again now, but her effort to be calm and natural was not without success—"only to Mr. Pennington and Mr. Poynz, unless Mr. Doyle will listen too. I have nothing more to say to *you*, Nuel, about my cowardice in running here for company and safety."

"Now thin, Miss Nora, be dhrinkin' yer tay, me dear. It's three pairrts asleep ye be's, an' iver likely too, in the middle o' the night. An' it's riddy fur bed we all be's, an' the rest of us wantin' to stairt in gigs. Now thin, doaty, dhrink away, an' nothin' pay."

More than one of the listeners smiled at Kitty's unusual, heavy coaxing, but Nora herself seemed to understand why, at that moment, Kitty should address her as she had so often done in her lonely babyhood.

"This is very nice," she said, smiling into the old woman's dim eyes, when she had raised the tea-cup to her lips. "But it is a curious time to have tea, isn't it? And," with a sweeping glance, the carelessness and tranquillity of which were well-feigned, "No one else is having it with me? Please, Kitty, bring some for Celia."

"Never mind, dear," whispered Celia, quite at ease now that Nora was found, and comprehending little of the uneasiness of others; "we are going when you have drunk that. We are only waiting for you."

"Thank you," said Nora, simply; but it seemed as if Celia's words had quite a different effect from that of hastening her.

"I'm glad we brought a gig," observed Mr. Doyle; "for you don't look very fit to walk to Kilver, Miss Nora. No, don't argue, my dear. Just rest and get your roses back. How fortunate it was that Mr. Poynz happened to be staying here for to-night!"

"Dear me, you must have had a very great panic, Nora," put in the Vicar, finding his voice at last, with his eyes fixed on Nora's face, as it flushed and paled at every uttered word. "I really fail to understand what can have alarmed you so excessively."

"Surely we need not discuss that now," put in Dr. Armstrong, sharply. "Mr. Pennington, shall you drive my cousin back to Kilver, or shall I?"

It seemed as if only that very request had been wanting to rouse Nora into her old self, though her face was still so white and her hands so unsteady. She moved away from the window now, and spoke in her usual tones—a little lower than usual, perhaps, but neither hurried nor tremulous.

"It will be dawn in a few minutes," she said, looking

delightedly at Celia, because, without any appearance of haste, she was drinking the tea Kitty had brought her; "and then we may walk, mayn't we, Mr. Pennington? Please don't hurry, Celia. I have many a time been on the bog in the sunrise—at least, we don't see the sun for a long time, but I mean in the dawn. May we walk, Mr. Pennington?"

"I do not know how you are to go back otherwise, my dear," replied Mr. Doyle, placidly sipping his port as he intercepted the Vicar's answer. "The horse that brought us is scarcely fit for the further journey which he is to make with Dr. Armstrong. I suppose, Armstrong, you are in haste to be off, eh?"

"I have one or two little matters to settle with Mr. Poynz," observed Dr. Armstrong, as he buttoned his coat, while his eyes moved from Nora to Mark with a savage light in them; "but I shall not settle them here or now. I will drive Nora to Kilver myself. I've no wish to linger in the house of—in such a house as this."

"Breen holds your horse at the side-door," observed Mark, without turning, as he stood near the dying fire. "Nothing need detain you here. The gig will not hold both the young ladies, and, however they go, they will go together."

"I presume, Doyle," Nuel continued, the veins high in his forehead, while he looked beyond Mark as if he had not heard him, "that you will see your ward safely into some place which is an authorised shelter for her. I will talk with her myself to-morrow. Nora, you will remain at home until you have seen me."

"Guests at the Vicarage," put in the Vicar, with one of his rare glimpses of mild disdain, "are free to go in and out as they please, Dr. Armstrong. Did you forget that Miss St. George is my guest at present?"

"She may be your guest at present," muttered Nuel—"and to-night's scene testifies how safe *that* is for her; but she is in my care always, and I will do as I think wise."

For some few minutes after Dr. Armstrong had left the room silence rested on the little group. Mr. Pennington slowly paced the room, fretting over having witnessed the unbridled temper of a man who had been an acquaintance for so many years, and would most probably be so for many more. The lawyer stood stroking his chin meditatively, and pondering upon what business Mr. Poynz wanted him at Traveere; and Mark himself, while the two girls put down their cups in silence, wondered—as for hours he had never ceased to wonder—what had been Nora's motive in coming to the house.

The dawn was creeping chill and gray along the bog, when at last Mark opened the hall-door for them, and Mr. Pennington paused to persuade him and the lawyer to come with them.

"Willingly," said Mr. Doyle, in his cheery way. "Traveere

is but a gloomy dwelling at best, and it will not be *at best* when we have just parted from our friends, will it?"

Mark acceded without any hesitation, guessing nothing of Nora's whispered entreaty to Mr. Pennington to bring them. So they started all together, Nora walking, rather slowly and silently, between Mr. Doyle and the Vicar, and looking about her anxiously all the while; and Celia and Mr. Poynz in advance, talking cheerfully as they went. But, when they had entered the Vicarage, and despatched the sleepy boy to bed, Nora stood before Mark Poynz, and begged him wistfully to listen while she told him what had frightened her.

"Not now," he pleaded earnestly, as he looked down into her white face. "Rest first."

"No, please," she said, looking round upon them all, as they stood in the faint, chill light. "Please let me tell you now—all of you—for I feel—" She had been going to say that she felt that even daylight could not save one whom Shan Corr had determined to murder, and that his defeated plan would make him only more determined and dangerous; but she corrected herself, and, speaking quietly, simply told the plot that had been laid to shoot Mr. Poynz.

And, while he stood and listened, and knew how she had saved him, Mark's face grew white as death.

CHAPTER XXV.

The whirligig of Time brings in his revenges.

Twelfth Night.

THOUGH Rachel Corr had never been in bed that night, it was not until the usual hour next day that she opened the front door of her cottage, and began her morning work. She had spent the rest of the night—after she had left old Biddy's cabin—locked into her own little bedroom, and so Shan had not guessed that she was not only awake, but listening in an anguish of fear, when he came in at dawn. And now, when he came down, he would see everything just as usual, and his mother pursuing her ordinary tasks. So Rachel thought, while she pursued these tasks as she had never done before, her eyes hollow and feverish, her step weak and uncertain, and her hands almost useless in their unsteadiness. At the slightest sound she started backwards, as if she had been struck, every limb trembling, and her breath quick and irregular. And just once she folded her hands high above her head, and her lips moved slowly, though the cry never passed them.

"Not murder! Oh, kind Heaven, not murder!"

Her morning tasks were all finished, and no traces left of her

own untasted breakfast, when Shan at last came down-stairs. and, without addressing a word of salutation to his mother, sat down moodily in his place at the table.

"Haven't ye made a frish cake?" he demanded, after a time, without turning to his mother, as she sat behind him with her sewing."

"No, not this morning."

For an instant something in her voice puzzled him, and he turned and gave her one lowering suspicious glance; but her face was bent over her work, and there was such utter calm in her attitude and occupation that he felt angry with himself for the momentary uneasiness, and noisily dragging his chair closer to the table, emptied his cup at a draught.

"Ye're moighty quiet," he remarked presently, his mouth almost too full for the words to be distinguishable, while the tone was harsh and full of distrust.

Mrs. Corr raised her head nervously; but her eyes went no farther than the little window of the shop. She would have given much to be able to talk—even if only for a few minutes—in her usual way, before Shan left her again; but it seemed impossible, while her heart was so heavy with dread, and—yes; even though he was her husband's son—with hatred too.

Suddenly, as she still looked vacantly and wistfully out upon the road, her pulses quickened, and she rose in nervous haste.

"Here's Mr. Doyle," she said, struggling to regain her usual tones, as she opened the outer door; while Shan muttered angrily that "the liyer" and was not wanted there.

"I won't come in, thank you, Mrs. Corr," said Mr. Doyle. in a prompt, untroubled way, which in itself gave Rachel infinite relief; "still I cannot pass the door without asking how you are. All alone, I see," he went on, not allowing her time to contradict him, and to tell him—what he had cleverly managed to see for himself—that Shan was within hearing distance, "and busy as usual. I mustn't let Miss St. George come and hinder you, must I? By-the-way, she had such a curious panic last night; but you will hear of it, no doubt, and I need not stop to tell. Only it was odd, wasn't it, that she should so thoroughly forget present circumstances, in a moment of alarm, that she ran straight to Traveere in the most natural manner? I shouldn't at all wonder, not at all," reiterated the lawyer, with no evidence of seeing either Rachel's eager questioning face or Shan's heavy indifference, "if she did not cry, 'Oh, grandpa!' as soon as ever she reached the familiar rooms. Curious, wasn't it? And there she waited until Mr. Pennington fetched her after he had left Biddy; so you may guess how late it was. I suppose nothing could have induced her to venture out again before daylight. She never used to be cowardly, I am sure, and yet she seemed unaccountably so last night, when I and Doctor Armstrong

arrived and found her there. She says she heard a sound by the river—quite half a mile from Traveere—but of course, as we tell her, it was only in her imagination. I am sure Mr. Poyntz must have been frightened too by her sudden entrance. By-the-way, I don't know why he should have been there either; it is such a comfortless place. Yet he will have another night of it. They wanted him to stay at the Vicarage; but, no, he says he has decided to finish the work in which he was interrupted last night, and he will do it at Traveere, just going on where he began it yesterday evening. He says the room is perfectly comfortable, and that he never missed the carpets or curtains."

Shan sat with his back to the speaker, and no one saw his face, yet Mr. Doyle was well aware that his hands were quite still now, and that his breakfast was suspended.

"And so," continued the lawyer, as he turned to go on his way, "though the Penningtons have done their best to keep him at the Vicarage, and I've done my best to lure him to Fintona, he refuses to spend to-night anywhere but at Traveere. Bah! In solitude in that grim place! Well, every man to his taste, I suppose; and, as he truly says, what is there here for an Englishman to fear?"

There was a little pause, while the lawyer's eyes passed cursorily over the young Irishman's slouching figure; and then he spoke, as if in sudden recollection.

"I am actually going away without having given you Miss St. George's message! I was to tell you she would come and see you to-morrow; and you are not take any notice, she says, of her childish fright last night, for she is quite well to-day, and sent you her love. Good day," he added, cheerfully, turning away, while the slow colour rose in Rachel's face, and her eyes grew full of gratitude; "good day; I will tell Miss Nora all you say."

Perhaps it was because he remembered that there had not passed a word on Mrs. Corr's side, that a smile broke over his face when he had walked only a few yards away; but every trace of it had vanished by the time he took his seat in a hired car which was waiting for him on the outskirts of the village.

For quite an hour after he had finished his breakfast, Shan Corr sat over the kitchen fire, doing nothing; and Rachel, while she worked near the window, scarcely dared to look round at him! but at the end of that time he got up as if with a sudden resolution, and went upstairs to the little back attic which Micky had been accustomed to share with him. While he was away, Rachel's hands lay idle in her lap, and her head was raised as if, now that she could not see him, she must needs follow every step. But when, after a long minute's silence, a heavy weight was set down in one corner of the room, and she knew that

he had been examining his rifle, she took up her work hastily, and never raised her head again."

When Shan came down-stairs at last, he took his hat and passed out of the house without a word; but Rachel, venturing to look after him, saw with relief that he carried nothing in his hand.

He had just reached the open gate of Traveere, slouching lazily along with a short clay pipe in his mouth, when Mr. Poynz came down from the house, sauntering too, and with a cigar between his lips.

"I wurr comin' up to the house," observed Shan, in his hard and moody tones. "I wurr bringin' the rint fur our place."

"Too soon," said Mark, a little amusement in his shrewd eyes, as they were fixed on the young Irishman's heavy features, "This is only the first day of May; quarter-day is on the twenty-fourth of next month. In March and December last, of course, you paid your rent to Mr. Doyle."

"No, I didn't," muttered Shan, evidently trying to repress his surliness. "It's the Chrastmis an' Laddy-day rint I be's here to pay. An' if ye'll give me a resate, I'll not kape ye."

"And why," asked Mr. Poynz, with easy nonchalance, "have you been allowed to remain in that cottage rent-free? Is the country indebted to you for any act of bravery, which Mr. Doyle and I are expected to repay with willingness and pride?"

"Toimes were throughother thin," said Corr, counting the silver he had turned out of a greasy little black bag. "If it be's hon'stly I pay it now, what need o' bullyin'? Ye'd better take the mawny, an' hand me over a resate as D'yle 'll read plain."

"Yes, I understand," returned Mark, in a pleasant, appreciative sort of way; "you would like that Mr. Doyle—and perhaps anyone else whom it may in future concern—should see that you were the soul of honesty, to-day, and not at all indebted to me for the roof that covers you. You shall have the receipt, as formally and clearly drawn up as you can wish, to-morrow, Corr."

"To-morra won't do," declared Shan, angrily shuffling under the keen gaze. "I'll be away to-morra."

"You'll be away to-morrow," repeated Mark, pondering. "A little holiday trip, eh? Well put up your money, and leave it with your mother, while you take that excursion you have planned, and which I hope will do you good. Tell her to keep it in her charge till Mr. Doyle calls upon her for it. If he calls to-morrow morning, *after* you have left, the receipt shall be as correct and circumstantial as if you had paid to-day, and—wiped off all the scores your landlord had against you."

"I'd loike," said Shan, turning back after he had started from the gate, and doing his best to bring in carelessly the question which he knew to be of such vital importance, "to see D'yle; but he—he's back to Fintona, I s'pose, an' not comin' here agin the day?"

"No, not again to-day," acquiesced Mark, placidly. "You can see him to-morrow morning, though, quite early—as early as you will like."

It was quite dark that night when Shan returned home, but he entered the cabin looking a little more genial than usual.

"I met a lad comin' fur ye, mother," he said, lying skilfully. "Ye're wanted to Biddy's. I tould him I'd send ye, an' he needn't come on. Niver mind me tay. I'll git a bit an' sup meself. You be quick."

"I was just going," announced Rachel, as she nervously tied on her bonnet. "I only waited for you to come in first. Miss Nora has sent for me too. So, if you are going to stay in, I can call round at the Vicarage."

"Call whurr ye loike," returned Shan. "It's loikely I be's goin' out agin, isn't it, an' on'y jist come in? But ye talk ribbish alwis."

"Not quite always," corrected Rachel, very coldly, as she wrapped her unsteady fingers in her shawl; "and if you *do* go out, Shan, of course you'll leave the key as usual."

"Goin' out! Goin' out!" shouted Corr, fiercely. "How ye rant about it! Don't I tell ye once fur all I be stayin' in?"

"Then when you go to bed, Shan, leave the key as usual."

"Why wouldn't I?" muttered Shan. But his step-mother had left the house then, and was out of hearing.

For quite two hours he waited in the cottage-kitchen, the outer door locked, and the shutters closed upon the little show of sweets and toys in the window; then he extinguished the light—the fire had died out long before—and, opening the door, stood for a few minutes looking out into the darkness. His eyes grew accustomed to it presently, and then he turned back, and, without any difficulty, took his gun from a corner of the dark kitchen. With it on his shoulder, he stood to lock the door on the outside, and to deposit the key in its usual hiding-place. Then he walked on, keeping to the road, and getting over the ground but slowly in his excessive caution. As usual, the broken gate at Travecro was half-open, and Corr passed through it easily, without having to remove his gun; but in the rough avenue it was more difficult to walk straight and steady, and to keep perfect silence. Still he knew the ground well, and made his way direct to the spot where he had hidden himself the night before; and there before him, from the exposed and open window, the light came lavishly.

He stood aside a minute where the rays could not reach him, and, resting his gun upon the ground, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead with a torn red handkerchief. Then he stepped cautiously and noiselessly forward, and looked into the room, through the uncurtained window. A large turf-fire burned in the grate, and just then the old servant, whom Corr knew so well, was piling more turf upon it. On the table before this fire two wax

candles were burning clearly, and below them—Shan's loose heavy features relaxed a little now in his supreme content—he saw that Mr. Poynz was writing; for the feather of his pen was plainly to be seen over his right shoulder, as he sat directly in the line of light, with his head bent busily and his back to the open window.

Ah! this was worth waiting for! Was not the darkness even deeper on this night than it had been on the previous one, and the light clearer within; and would not his aim be far surer and easier? By the time the old woman had left the room, his hand would be steady, and there would still not have been time for Mr. Poynz to move. Kitty rose from the hearth and walked towards the door, but apparently her master called her, for she came back to the table, and spoke, evidently in answer to some remark. Then, with the characteristic nod which Shan knew quite well, she went away, closing the door behind her. Corr drew himself up after that intent gaze, and stepped back again into the darkness.

There was no need of another minute's hesitation. Kitty was safe in her kitchen; Breen would be asleep in that distant room of his over the stable; Mr. Doyle was far away at Fintona; Dr. Armstrong, if in the neighbourhood at all, would be, with every one else who knew the Englishman, at Kilver Vicarage, and in bed by now. The deepest silence hovered round the old house, and the darkness would make any attempt at discovery or pursuit simply madness in anyone, even supposing—

Shan broke off this thought with a contortion of his heavy lips which might have been intended for a smile, and then raised his gun slowly to his shoulder.

A pause of half a minute—a dark dead pause—and then the firm and heavy touch upon the trigger tightened. A bullet flew straight through the open window; entered the leaning figure; passed through it; struck the wall in front, and made a shivering hole there in the dark old rotten wainscot.

But Corr saw only that it had done the deadly work he had meant it to do, and that the man who had been writing had fallen forward on the table now, and was utterly still—as no human form could be, if life, however feeble, were not extinct.

"Dead enough!" muttered Shan, creeping backwards into the darkness, but keeping his gaze to the last upon the work which he had done so skilfully and effectually. "We shall have no more of his——"

A sudden start and turn, as—in a lightning flash—he became aware that he was not alone in the confederate darkness. A sudden wrench as he felt a touch upon him, and instinctively tried to shake it off in dread; and the next instant he was pinioned, and half a dozen men stood watching that wild stare of his, into the face of Mr. Poynz, who had been the first to seize

the murderer, and was now standing before him in the full light.

"Mr. Poyntz," shouted the lawyer, from the open lighted doorway, as the armed constabulary marched their prisoner down the avenue, "he ought to have come in first to see his victim. Shall the officers bring him back?"

"No," said Mark, coming up to the door, and wondering much at a strange exultancy in Mr. Doyle's tone, which seemed to him untimely.

"But he ought," the lawyer went on, his voice raised as if he would like it to travel as far as possible. "By all means he should have seen his victim—shot through the heart. A man likes to bring down his game fairly, and always likes to see how dead it falls. Besides that"—the old gentleman's excitement increased now with every word—"his bullet has done further mischief, which I would like him to see. By Jove! his face would have been a study, the rascal, when he saw what good he had done us all, instead of harm. I long to show him how the bullet, which was to have brought down the owner of Traveer, after passing easily through our straw contrivance, sped on its kindly way, and revealed to us the hidden fortune of old Colonel St. George. You look fairly incredulous, sir, as Englishmen always do over everything; but, by all the saints in Ireland, it's true!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

He lived a poor man, lest a poor he die.

THE Vicar of Kilver had rarely, throughout his whole parochial career, been roused to a state of excitement; but, on the morning after the chance discovery of old Colonel St. George's hidden wealth, his calm and patient little wife caught herself watching him in mute astonishment, as he paced restlessly about the breakfast room, giving no order for the bell to be rung for prayers, though it was nearly an hour beyond the usual time.

"Perhaps," suggested Mrs. Pennington, a little amused by this conduct, "the girls will not come in until they hear the bell. Nora has been out for hours, I hear, and when Celia finds her, they will probably loiter together until they are summoned."

"All in good time," the Vicar returned, pulling himself up at his wife's side; "Doyle will come down presently. He warned us he should sleep late after such a night. Did you notice, my dear, what spirits he was in? You may depend that, careful as he was not to show it, his guardianship rested heavily upon him so long as Nora was unprovided for."

"How strange it all was!" observed Mrs. Pennington, not

by any means for the first time. "I can hardly believe it even yet."

"Nor can I. And I'm sure Nora cannot."

"Oh, Nora will soon adapt herself to her new position," said Mrs. Pennington, with a smile. "Call to mind how often she has longed for money, and how little she has ever possessed. The wildest of those old dreams of hers seemed easy of fulfilment to her, I daresay, just in that first hour."

"Possibly," allowed the Vicar, reflectively; "yet something else was more dominant in her mind, for I never saw anything more pitiful than her gaze at that ridiculous straw figure, and the shudder that ran through her frame at sight of the spot where the bullet had pierced it."

"It's a pity," observed Mrs. Pennington, in her simple, practical way, "that the shot should have spoilt a coat! but still——"

"But still," said the Vicar, interrupting her with a laugh, "it did so much good *after* spoiling the coat, my dear, that if I were Nora, I should have felt more inclined to preserve the bullet, than to turn away from it as she did, with such unutterable repugnance. Dear me, dear me," he continued, repeating his old exclamation for at least the hundredth time, as he quickened his step again, "what could have induced old Colonel St. George to conceal his savings so effectually?"

"There is no difficulty in answering that," was the prompt and unexpected reply, as Mr. Doyle entered the room through one of the low windows—which, like those of the little drawing-room on the other side of the house—opened to the garden. "The inherent suspicion of a miser had a lively time of it, you may depend, in the old man's brain at the very last; for, from what I gathered last night, it would be only on the very night before his death that he hid his hoardings so skilfully behind the wainscot, that but for this attempted murder, they must have remained there undiscovered till doomsday—or, rather, till the old house fell wholly, as it fell partially on the night after he had so cleverly effected the concealment."

"But how," inquired Mr. Pennington, stopping in his walk, "can you tell that he did it on that night, or that he suspected any one? Whom could he suspect? He had no one about him but those two old servants—both as honest as they are ignorant—and Nora herself."

"He did not suspect either of *those*," said the lawyer, with a laugh; "but Kitty told us at the time of old Colonel St. George's death, if you recollect, just what she repeated last night—that on the night previous to the fall of the chimney, while she lay awake in alarm, she heard her old master walk many times backward and forward between his bed-room and the sitting-room—where we found the money—and that Dr. Armstrong was staying in the house that night, and had had rather a stormy scene with

the old man before they separated; especially, I believe, about Nora's going to England. Nora herself told us the rest, and how her grandfather said he had something to confide to her next day."

"Then you think he meant to reveal to Nora the hiding-place of what by his will she now inherits?"

"I do indeed. I believe for some cause—the pricking of conscience or a grain of real affection for the girl—he had determined she should be rich, and that his pretence of sending her to England was merely to lead Armstrong off the scent, and also entirely to blind Mr. Poyntz as to her possessing a penny. That's my conclusion Pennington, and I've thought these things well over since dawn to-day. He was a canny old screw, was St. George, but he little thought we should owe to Shan Corr's villany the possession of his wealth at last.

"I'm afraid," said the Vicar's wife, speaking rather low and timidly, "that Doctor Armstrong will try now, even more than he did at the time of her grandfather's death, to assert his right of guardianship over Nora."

"Then he must fail again even more signally than he failed then," returned Mr. Doyle, promptly. "Until she is of age, I will stick to the task the old man left me. I thought last night how much easier it would be now she is well provided for; but I declare the conviction has since then dawned upon me that a beautiful, restless girl with wealth at her command will be still harder to manage, and will soon bring my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"I am afraid so indeed," said the Vicar, with a laugh. "I suppose to-day you will have the notes and money counted."

"Yes; but we may be pretty sure they are exactly as they are labelled. Each of the fourteen greasy rolls of notes has *Five hundred pounds* written on the wrapper, and each of the twelve old canvas bags has *One thousand pounds* written on the paper under the seal. The old man *left* it as securely as he had *held* it."

"Did you ever suspect his money was hidden, Mr. Doyle?" asked Mrs. Pennington.

"At one time I certainly suspected that the old iron safe—which he always guarded as the apple of his eye—had secret receptacles; but when I examined it on the day of his funeral, I found my mistake. We had the house searched too, but that of course, was a mere farce, as there were no articles in it to help concealment. After that I felt sure that the old man's will was either a cruel jest, or the inexplicable freak of one whose brain was affected on the subject."

"Doctor Armstrong, I remember, seemed wonderfully surprised at there being no money in Colonel St. George's safe."

Mr. Doyle glanced round him rather uneasily as Mrs. Pennington spoke.

"Armstrong must have been puzzled *then*, if never in his life before."

"Do you remember," asked Mr. Pennington, presently, "how Corr attempted to get at the safe the day after the old Colonel's death? How little we thought *then*, that another dastardly attempt of his would give the money back to Nora!"

"But won't the law," asked Mrs. Pennington, reflecting, "give it to Mr. Poynz, as it was found on his property?"

The lawyer's laugh was interrupted by Mark's own entrance into the room.

"The English owner of Traveere," he said then, as he shook hands with him, "was the first and heartiest in his congratulations to Miss Nora. And I am very glad he stays in Ireland over to-day, that he may help us in forming some plan for her; because Armstrong will be sure to——By the way, where *is* she?" he added, pulling himself up hastily.

"Where indeed?" said the Vicar, smiling, as he rang the bell. "Celia went to fetch her quite an hour ago; but Celia herself is in such a state of excitement that I would not answer for her summoning anyone sensibly. If Celia owned the wealth herself, she could not be more delighted about it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

The eyes forget the tears they have shed,
And the heart forgets its sorrow and ache.

LOWELL.

FIRST to that little green seat among the shrubs on the tiny lawn, where she had felt sure she should find her, Celia went in her search for Nora; but the seat was empty, and Celia ran on, and sent a call over the stiff square beds in the kitchen-garden, to the silent dusky little orchard behind. But no answering note came back, and then Celia gazed ponderingly across the bog. Could it be that Nora had gone to her old pet spot beside the river, where the pine had fallen and made that pleasant resting place in which she had so often waited (long and vainly) for Celia in the old childish days? In her calm, grave moments Miss Pennington would have hesitated long before walking to this spot before breakfast, for the Vicar's daughter held disobedience as a crime, and knew she should be late for prayers; but this morning everything seemed different to her, because—beyond the bewildering consciousness of her old and often-scorned play-fellow and companion being suddenly changed into a lady of property—there were still the vibrations of those two nights' excitement. And so Celia hardly felt like the decorous little parish priestess she was, and ran across the bog with her hands ungloved and

her gipsy hat falling to the back of her head, just as she had many a time rebuked Nora for doing.

When she reached the river, there, sitting among the roots of the fallen pine, her hands clasped round her knee, and her eyes very grave and thoughtful as she looked down upon the water where it crept into the shadow of the little wood, sat Nora.

"At last!" cried Celia, reaching her almost breathless, and leaning beside her to rest. "Why, Nora, I expected to find you running about the bog wild with delight!"

"Why?"

Nora asked this without lifting her eyes from their long gaze, or unclasping her locked fingers.

"*Why?*" echoed Celia, in most unfeigned astonishment. "Because any girl *would* be wild with delight who had just come into a fortune."

"I forgot," said Nora, smiling a little, but still with the great seriousness in her beautiful eyes.

"And *you* of all girls," Celia went on, her astonishment growing every moment, "I was sure you would be more delighted than even I could be if I were you, because you have never had any money of your own, and always wanted it so badly, and talked so much about having it. How joyfully you used to tell us what you would do if you were rich! You will do it all now, I suppose. Oh, Nora, to think of it! Everything will seem so different to you."

"Everything does—to-day," said Nora, softly.

"Yes, of course," acquiesced Celia, as she fanned herself with her hat, "because to-day you are so differently situated."

"But it was the same yesterday," Nora went on, in her dreamy tones.

"Impossible, dear, for yesterday you knew nothing about it." But Celia turned her face a little as she fanned it, and looked rather intently into Nora's eyes. "What a wonderful change it will make for you, dear!" she went on, her characteristic staidness beginning to force its way at last through the uncharacteristic excitement. "You will have no need to teach now—and you know you were never very fit for it, were you?—and you can always have pocket-money and beautiful dresses."

"But there are things so—so much more important, Celia," observed Nora, with a little tightening of her locked fingers.

"Yes, of course," assented Miss Pennington, readily; "but you will have whatever you want."

"Then I will have you always with me." But Nora said it without her usual smile or caress; and, while Celia gazed at her in still growing wonder, there was a pause between them.

"Nora," said Miss Pennington presently, as she tied on her hat preparatory to a proposal to return home, "how little we thought yesterday, when we feared the coming of night, that it would all

end so well and luckily! Just to think that that bullet might have—Nora, dear, how you shiver! I cannot understand your seeming so spiritless, when everything has turned out so fortunately for you. It is just as if—I don't like saying it, though."

"What?" asked Nora, in that grave direct way of hers; though still without rousing herself from her long thought.

"Why, it looks, dear," said Celia, with only a slight hesitation, "so curious, you know. You always spoke delightedly of being rich, as long as it seemed utterly beyond the bounds of possibility; and now that you *have* the wealth, you seem to have no thoughts but gloomy ones. Of course we all know," she went on, with her usual matronly sedateness, "that a terrible crime was averted by Providence, but you know, dear, Mr. Poynz's safety is a thing for us *all* to rejoice over; and his danger did not, after all, affect *you* more particularly than any of us. So I think people will wonder if you let them see that it did. You understand me, don't you?"

"Not—quite."

"I mean, Nora," said Miss Pennington, faltering a little now, as she met the grave, questioning glance, "that, if you are so thoroughly depressed by his past peril—while it evidently has not depressed him at all—people will say—can't you guess, dear?"

"No."

"Oh, you could, if you thought over it for a few moments!" said Celia, a little impatient, but more with herself than with Nora. "I mean that people will say it looks as if you cared more for him than—you need. You are not angry with me, dear, I hope, for warning you what strangers would say, and just setting you on your guard? You would rather *I* said it to you than any one else, wouldn't you?"

"No," replied Nora, her eyes brilliant and restless, as she rose from her seat. "I would rather others had said it—strangers that I don't care for; anybody but you, Celia; because I always fancied you liked me, and made allowances for me, and would feel how—— But"—with her fingers pressed upon her eyes for a few moments—"I hardly understand what it was. No, no, don't say it again. What need have we to talk of Mr. Poynz? If"—with a forced, stiff smile—"if he had been killed last night, we should have had a right to speak of him—you and I. But he is safe now, and—and—yes, I understand exactly what you mean. Shall we go back?"

They turned and left the river then, side by side, but in silence, as they had rarely walked before. At last, quite suddenly, as they came in sight of the Vicarage, Nora linked her arm in Celia's, and spoke to her with a laugh—a laugh which told nothing of how those silent moments had fixed in the girl's mind for ever the lesson taught so suddenly and harshly by her

friend's few warning words; the lesson a girl can learn only once in her life.

"Celia, how delightful it is to be rich!"

"Oh, at last you are awake to the fact!" said Miss Pennington, thoroughly relieved to hear Nora speak lightly and happily again, and guessing nothing of the childlike, defiant bravery which rose within her, resolved to resist the woman's knowledge of her own heart. "I thought you were never going to acknowledge how pleased you were."

"Pleased!" cried Nora, rapturously. "I am enchanted, Celia. Oh, how splendid it will be not to have to teach, or economise, or even to study! I never shall study now. I'm not obliged to do so."

"Oh, I expect you will!" smiled Celia. "You will like it now you are not obliged to do it."

"I never shall. And I have such wonderful things to do, and places to see; because I have never seen anything yet—have I?—except during that *one* day I had, Celia—that one beautiful day."

"I cannot find out that the Fosters ever took you anywhere of their own will."

"Never. I shall show them now a much pleasanter way of living."

"And serve them out, you mean?" explained Celia. "Quite excusable too, dear. If I were you——"

"You will be—almost," laughed Nora. "I shall go nowhere without you. Oh, Celia, we two will be so happy! The days will be all full of joy, and—*nothing* shall make me unhappy. And, Celia, with a little shake of her head, as if unconsciously discarding some remembrance, "I shall send first for a huge box of things for Rachel's shop, because, when I said she must live with me, she said so decidedly that she would not till I——"

"I heard her," put in Celia, in the pause; "she said not till you married and had a house. She should be only a burden, she said, before that, but afterwards she could serve you well."

"Poor Rachel!" said Nora gently. Then, in her old happy tones, she went on picturing what she and Celia were to do with her wealth. And when Mark Poynz joined them at the Vicarage gate, the planning was not only not broken off, but Celia even fancied that the promises grew wilder and more startling, as if Nora's eyes had only that moment been *quite* thoroughly opened to the great blessing of wealth.

"Do be quiet, Nora," entreated Celia, her very breath suspended; "you are making *everybody* rich. Remember Tom and Nat can work for themselves, and I don't believe Kitty would be half so happy in that cottage you picture as in her kitchen at Traveere. And Bran won't get well at all, I fear, and Borak—why, of course he's too old to care!"

"Mr. Poynz," said Nora gravely, "will you please let me buy Traveere again, and Borak and all?"

"Do you think," said Mark, and Celia wondered why he still seemed as if he could not be quite kind and glad about Nora's wealth, "that luxury, like a Mephistophelian potion, will make every Faustus young again? Well, let us try; we can but fail at last."

"We will not fail," asserted Nora, lightly. "Everything will succeed now, and—I am so happy!"

Mark smiled a little. He knew perfectly well that she had hastily substituted those last four words for others which had been half uttered; but he needed no verbal translation of the brilliancy of her eyes, and the swift, sweet smile that curled her lips.

"I suppose, Mr. Poynz," said Celia, simply, "that you think riches are a temptation, and bring troubles of their own, because I noticed you did not look quite so pleased as any of the others did last night, when the discovery of Nora's money was made."

"I had found no treasure," was Mark's cool reply: but even Celia noticed how quickly he turned his eyes at that moment from Nora's face.

"Of course, I am not quite sure yet," said Nora, thoughtfully, "that the money is really all mine."

"Not at all. Lawyers can do anything they like, and they may give it to Borak."

"And," Nora went on, laughing now, "if it is, shall I be *very* rich, Mr. Poynz?"

"So rich that I shall boldly demand a pension, until that coming day when I go down to the Surrey hospital, and put in my claim for a refuge, as being at last 'fifty years of age and unmarried.'"

"I remember," said Nora, with such pretty nonchalance that neither listener could guess how her heart was beating in the struggle of her new self-knowledge. "Won't it be nice for you? It must be such a very cheerful place, because of course it is for gentlemen who are *afraid* of marrying, and they must feel quite safe and comfortable at fifty years of age."

"Nora," whispered Celia, holding her back a moment as the girls hung their hats in the hall at the Vicarage, "I beg your pardon for saying what I did at the river about Mr. Poynz. I can see how wrong I was, but I can see too that you don't mind. So we are good friends again, aren't we?"

"Good friends?" questioned Nora, earnestly. "Yes, always, Celia, please. "You and I will be good friends all our lives, I hope, whatever other friends we make—or lose."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

She must suffer who can love.

Prior.

THROUGH many hours during that day were Nora's plans discussed at the Vicarage ; but it seemed as if every proposal must be followed by the recollection of a drawback, and almost more than in the old days of her unnoticed childhood did the girl feel her loneliness just then. But no one guessed this, and Celia was not the only one who said Nora's sudden access of fortune had evidently put the finishing touch to her happiness. Yet Mrs. Pennington once or twice detected a note of sadness in the pretty voice, and Mr. Poynz caught himself looking now and then into her restless eyes, as if he tried to trace some shadow which lay there below their laughter. Sometimes the girls themselves escaped from these constant debates, and, going out into the garden, ran races with the children, and laughed more merrily than they did ; or sat upon the uncomfortable green seat, and formed wild plans of future greatness, until they were called in again, perhaps to hear what was Mr. Doyle's last proposal.

Under whose care was Nora to enjoy the wealth her grandfather had hoarded for her ? In whose home was she to spend this first uninterrupted holiday-time of her life ? Both the Vicar and his wife joined Mr. Doyle in negativating at once Celia's modest proposal of her remaining with them at Kilver ; and Nora herself frankly confessed that she wanted to stay first in England—in London especially—and enjoy what she had so often and so vainly longed to enjoy. And afterwards perhaps she could see those beautiful parts of the world of which she had read and dreamed.

"The notion," Mr. Doyle said, resolutely, in Nora's absence, "of burying at Kilver a beautiful, high-spirited girl who has wealth at her command, could not for a moment be entertained by a guardian who was not utterly insane. She has not seen the world," he went on, "and she wants to see it. She makes no secret of that ; and we must find some means for her to do so now. The least we can do with old St. George's money is to give some pleasure and ease to the girl who was held by him of so much less value. If my own household were not that of an old bachelor, and I had a wife to chaperon her, I would move to London myself, and make a charming home for her there ; but personally, you see, I can do nothing beyond advising and superintending."

In the afternoon Willoughby Foster arrived unexpectedly at Kilver, and, in the surprise of seeing him just then (while all their own plans were so unsettled) no one seemed to notice how quickly he must have followed Nora from England. It almost

appeared as if he had heard of her fortune, and had come on purpose to lend another voice to their council.

Of course now Nora would go back with him to Great Cumberland Place. His mother would be charmed to have her again, a rich girl who would be—would be the fashion.

"Thank you," said Nora, laughing at the rather lame conclusion of his remark, "but I don't want to go back to Cumberland Place."

"Weren't you happy there?" whispered Will, as if the alternative had never really struck him till that moment.

"No," said Nora, frankly, "I never could feel at home with you—I never could feel at home there. And of what use is it to be rich, if I must go back to be solitary in that school-room where I used to study all day long?"

"But you need not——"

"No, I need not," put in Nora, lightly, "so I will not, please."

"Then what do you want, dear?" asked Will, as if any longing beyond what his proposal could amply satisfy, must be an illegal one, which it would be wise to investigate.

"I want one happy summer," said Nora, standing at the window as she spoke, but not looking out, even when Mark came up from the garden and paused there beside her. "I want Celia with me always; and——" But the wistful glance across at Mrs. Pennington betrayed very little hope of any fulfilment of that last unspoken desire.

"You want one happy summer?" repeated Will, reflectively. "Is that all?"

"That is all I'm thinking of just now."

"With true Irish philosophy," put in Mark, "you would gladly give your wealth for one delightful summer, eh, Miss St. George?"

And she nodded with a smile, for she did not know how near the truth his careless words had fallen.

"Would it do, Mr. Doyle," questioned Nora, presently, "if Miss Archer would manage my house? And, Celia, would you come then and stay with me?"

This was only another proposal to be negatived briefly and decisively. And it was then that an idea was conveyed to Mrs. Pennington, which grew and strengthened into a determination later on that day, when Dr. Armstrong came in. Everyone saw at a glance how the news of Corr's arrest, which he had received in Fintona, had excited him; but they were all yet to see how the further tidings of Nora's fortune could inflame his love and jealousy until his habitual suavity had gone beyond recall.

The old plea of a guardianship—self-imposed—was urged once more; but, under the lawyer's pointed reminders of Colonel St. George's will, that fell at last. Then Dr. Armstrong "recollected" that he had a lady friend in London who would give

Nora a home in her pleasant household, or even take her abroad with her own daughters. Nuel glanced across at Nora as he held out this inducement, because he felt it must be irresistible to the girl who had so long and vainly yearned to see the world but Nora was only looking with simple astonishment into his white, stiff face, while Mr. Doyle answered briefly that "presently" Nora and he would arrange it all.

"You had better now," said Nuel, addressing the lawyer with curt disrespect, as his efforts failed, "show the letter of trust which you hold."

"There is no occasion at all," was the rejoinder. "It relates to Miss St. George's fortune only, not to her guardian."

"Is it something I ought to know?" asked Nora, with earnestness.

"No, my dear, though the knowledge of it could never hurt you. Under one condition—which is a most improbable one, I'm glad to say—you forfeit your property. That is all."

"And what is the condition, Mr. Doyle?"

"No matter. If I ever see you likely to break it, I will tell you in good time."

"And, if I forfeit the property, to whom does it go?"

"Ladies should never ask questions, and lawyers never answer them. Armstrong, need I remind you that I am sole executor?"

"I have one thing to ask you, Mr. Doyle," put in the Vicar's wife, in her gentle, unruffled tones, and speaking spontaneously, as it seemed—for no one knew of her whispered conferences—"I am myself wishing to spend a month or two in London this summer. If I take a furnished house, instead of private apartments, will you allow your ward to spend that time with me and my daughter?"

It was with great difficulty that Mrs. Pennington went through this speech successfully, for Celia's astonishment and Nora's delight went far towards making her break down and betray the effort this decision had cost her. But, when Mr. Doyle gave his cordial and delighted assent, and even Willoughby Foster acknowledged that this was the kindest plan of all, her spirits rose again, and she was able to discuss her intentions quite decisively, though gently, when Dr. Armstrong argued subtly in their disfavour.

So it was all decided at last, and Nora never knew that Mr. Poyntz had had any voice in the arrangement beyond that promise of his to seek a house for Mrs. Pennington on his return to town. Then he bade them all good-bye, because he was going back to Fintona that night, and on to London the next day.

"I will find a pleasant house for you," he said, as he took Nora's offered hand; "I will try to satisfy all your tastes and fancies."

"It will be Mrs. Pennington's house," observed Nora, simply,

"so I shall be happy there, whatever it is. It is so kind of you to come," she went on, with her hand upon the little lady's shoulder. "But you don't quite hate the thought of it—sure you don't?"

"Sure she does," mimicked the Vicar, smiling at the Irish question. "Didn't you hear her say she knows nobody in London? Then just think how lonely she will be, with only you two girls, and an occasional visit from me."

"You will soon have acquaintances in plenty," observed Mark, with his usual composure.

"You mean you will not let us mope," said Mrs. Pennington, smiling, because she knew how impossible it would be.

But Nora did not trust herself to speak again, and Celia, with dancing eyes, was listening while Will Foster told her that he should wait in Ireland a few days, that he might escort them all to London.

And then Nuel Armstrong crossed the room to Nora's side, and told her peremptorily that he must speak to her alone.

"I am going to Rachel Corr's; will you come part of the way, then?" asked Nora, with a determination to hide from all who were present her involuntary reluctance to have him with her. Did he not thoroughly belong to her old life, and had he not been her grandfather's friend?

She looked back as they passed through the Vicarage gate, and returned Celia's smile; but Dr. Armstrong—though, keeping at her side, he paused or hurried just as she did—never turned his head. Nor, though he looked straight before him, and had not yet glanced into Nora's face, did he lose the furtive, concentrated expression in his eyes.

So they walked on in silence, until they were nearly half-way across the bog. Then Nora, a little amused by being summoned to a conference and never addressed, inquired rather lazily if Nuel had said all he meant to say.

"It is not often I demand to speak to you in private now, Nora," he began, his voice as concentrated as his gaze, "but when I do, it is for some purpose, you may be sure. Send back that dog," he added, presently, in her pause. "You attend more to him than to what I am saying."

"You are not saying anything very important yet," remarked Nora, linking her fingers in Bran's collar, as the old dog limped on persistently at her side.

Just as she did so, the blood came hotly and painfully up into her cheeks, because she remembered the last time she and Nuel had walked across the bog with the old sheep-dog at her side. "Nora." There upon the old brass collar was the name which had been cut on it that night. While her fingers touched it, she turned quite gently to Nuel, as if at that moment the fact shone out clearly before her that this was the last time of all that they

could walk so on the old familiar ground. Yet had she not known him all her life? Could she ever recollect a time when Nuel had not asserted himself her guide and Mentor.

"Nuel," she said, thoughtfully, "it seems just as if the old time had gone from me to-day—suddenly—for ever. I don't know why, but it is so; and I've no words to say of it even to you, that might hold it back for only one other hour. But perhaps you have. *Now* I will think more of what you say than of Bran. Poor fellow, I wish he were quite well again."

"I will soon restore him," said Dr. Armstrong eagerly. "Trust him to me, Nora. The Englishman has—very naturally, as you will say—neglected the useless old animals at Traveere. What wonder? A chilly, heartless fellow, who has grown sulky and taciturn now your grandfather's wealth has been discovered, and can only be yours! He grudged you even that, my poor little girl."

"Did you think so?" asked Nora. "But then you didn't see his face when I reminded him that *he* had bought Traveere and everything it contained."

"He took the joke, I suppose," returned Nuel, his tight lips scarcely parted. "Trust a shrewd, experienced man of the world to know how to turn every position to account. But I hope you will never be deceived, Nora, and mistake a false friend for a true."

"I hope not," said Nora, negligently. "Is that all you wanted to say, Nuel?" And, as she asked the question, she stopped, and stood leaning against an upright cutting of turf, as if she tried to feel that their conference was over, and to prevent his going farther.

"Nora, you recollect that Doyle holds a letter of trust given him by your grandfather?"

"Yes."

Bran had laid himself down at her feet, and her hands were linked before her. She stood the very picture of idle content Nuel thought, as, under the tilted brim of her hat, he saw the happy dreaming of her eyes.

"Nora," he said—and for a moment his hand went out, as if he would have drawn her to him as he used to do in that uncherished childhood of hers; but in the next his hand fell, and even his eyes turned from her as he spoke—"did you never feel anxious to know something of your parents?"

She turned to him in unfeigned surprise, for had he not for years always silenced her on the subject?

"Oh, Nuel, I long and long to hear of them! Ever since I can remember, my best dream has been to find some one who will tell me of them. You never would; grandpa never would let me even utter in his presence the—the words that other girls say so often. Father! Mother! I have whispered them to

myself in the night, or out here alone upon the bog, but no one ever listened if I tried to win a faint, faint memory to hold in my heart. Have I felt anxious to know? you ask. Ah, you could never, never know *how* anxious! Many and many a night I've cried myself to sleep because I felt I shouldn't know them even in Heaven, because no one could tell me a word about them. Are you—are you going to tell me now, Nuel."

"If I knew, I would," he said, the dusky colour rising slowly in his face under the longing, questioning glance. "And, as I have long felt that the mystery ought to be traced for you, and you ought to know what your grandfather had no right to keep from you, I am going to do you that service, Nora. No, don't thank me dear," he added, hurriedly, as he feigned to mistake the sudden question in her eyes; "I will not be thanked for doing a simple duty, for duty's sake. When I have done it, you shall thank me as you will, and repay me as your kind and generous heart dictates. No longer than I can help, shall you live as you are living now, Nora—under a name to which you have no right. No longer," he reiterated, with slow significance, as she started up with brilliant, flashing eyes.

"What do you mean, Nuel? Speak plainly. I am a little bewildered to-day, and slow—and tired. What did you say about my name?"

"Nothing against it, my dear," Doctor Armstrong replied, with his stiff smile, "for it was your grandfather's, and, of course, your mother's."

"My father's, you mean," Nora corrected, slowly. But her fingers had grown a little nervous now, and she pushed her hat from her forehead, as if its light weight oppressed her."

"That," said Nuel, pointedly—but he looked down while he spoke, as if even then the sight of her emotion could so strangely move him—"is what your grandfather chose that you, and everyone else, should believe; but that was not the truth. Your father's name, for some reason which the old man best understood, was kept secret. Possibly it may have been best to do so; but perhaps there is justice yet to be done to his memory, and I, who love his child so devotedly, will do it. Hush! Don't thank me, darling, till I come to you some day and tell you of your father, bringing you his name, without a stain upon it of dishonour or of—crime.

"What?"

The girl's cry was sharp and sudden, as now with both hands she pushed her hair from her temples, and the white fingers clung there as if their hold sustained her.

"Yes," said Nuel, in a whisper, and he picked up her hat, and stood looking down upon it as he held it in his hands, "though Colonel St. George died in the fullest confidence that your father's name would disgrace you, Nora, it was perhaps only because

he did not love you enough to trouble himself to investigate. That is left for me; and to-day, when I heard that at last the wealth is yours which you so well deserve, I determined that your own name should be yours too. I determined that I would restore this to my love, and then I should have no wish unsatisfied; for you would be honoured in the world, as well as wealthy and happy."

"Perhaps no happier," put in Nora, low and dreamily, as if she uttered the thought unconsciously.

"But you *must* be happier, dear," said Nuel, meeting her eyes fully for the first time. "Your grandfather's name of course is a good and honest name——"

"Yes, he always said so," Nora remarked, quietly, in Doctor Armstrong's inexplicable pause.

"And you shall bear that till I bring you a still higher. If I cannot find it pure and respected, you must be sorry for me, Nora, for I shall feel, even more keenly than you can do, the disappointment for you. Then I shall lay my own name at your feet, and you will take it, and no one will ever hear from me a secret which is ours alone."

"Not mine!" cried the girl, passionately. "No secret that is yours is mine!"

"Then tell the world," rejoined Nuel, icily, "How your grandfather would not let you be known by (or even mention) your father's name, because he thought it disgraced; but that, as *you* wish and choose to bear it now, you would drag the poor forgotten, discarded name even to the light of a criminal court."

"That is what—you offered to do."

"What *I* offer!" cried Nuel, bending to look into her face, with a smile which she did not attempt to return. "My darling, you know me better than that, even in the moments when you are coldest to me. No, listen a moment, and I will explain what I will do for the one I love so entirely, and have loved so long. You will keep your own name at present, and every one will love and respect it for your sake. But, as it is not yours—as it is not yours," he repeated, emphatically, while her wide grave eyes were still upon his face, as if she needed their help even to *hear* him, "by any legal right, I shall spend that time in seeking for you the one which *is* your rightful inheritance. If it is stainless, you shall bear it proudly then, my darling. If not, you and I will keep the secret well, and go together from the society which always looks so coldly and cruelly on disgrace. Nora, your grandfather never guessed that I should boldly undertake this commission for your sake; but, my darling, he always wished you to trust your future to me, and died in the full confidence of your doing so."

"He never said so," Nora interposed, wearily.

He said so to me often—almost every time I saw him," said

Dr. Armstrong, his thin lips closing now and then over the slow lies. "Oh, you will obey him, I know, presently, Nora! I shall not hurry you, dear; I have never hurried you, because I felt so sure your grandfather's wish would be fulfilled, and you would be mine at last. Not,"—his breath grew just the least bit laboured and uncertain here, but Nora did not notice it—"not because it is impossible for you to marry legally and honourably in the name you bear, but because I shall have given you then the truest possible test of a man's love. Nora, if I resign my practice here, with all the old connections and associations; and for the whole summer pursue this one aim for you, you cannot refuse me my recompense when I succeed. Darling is not that a fair love-test? Could you yourself give any lover a more trying one? Acknowledge, Nora, that the man who would do *that* must love you beyond measure."

"Yes," said Nora, answering absently, because he questioned her with so cruelly searching a glance.

"And could you do less for your father's memory than give yourself to the man who clears his name from all reproach, and gives it to you? Nora, that is a fair love-test, my darling. Let it be Yes, and then see how eagerly I will go to my task."

"And if—anyone else could fulfil it?" interrogated Nora, her eyes far away, and her voice low and troubled.

"I—well, I will stand the chance," said Dr. Armstrong, with a sudden unaccountable buoyancy. "Who else is likely? Young Foster would blunder and fail in the first attempt. Poynz would not attempt it at all. The very suspicion of any degradation attached to your name would prevent his ever raising his hand to help you or yours, for he is only an indolent, self-engrossed man of the world. What is it, darling? Why did you start?" he asked, adroitly intercepting and misunderstanding Nora's impetuous, scornful dissent. "So let him think you Miss St. George still, and then he will remain your friend as much—or rather as little—as he has ever been; though, as I understood from your grandfather, on the night after he had seen Mr. Poynz at Traveere, it is in some way owing to *his* family that your childhood has been so solitary and hard."

"I will ask Mr. Doyle."

For one second the veins rose like cords in Dr. Armstrong's forehead, and the brows came down over his eyes, as a flash of fear and anger darted from them; but in the next he was laughing a little, and then he answered, in his lightest and easiest tones—

"Ask Doyle with pleasure, dear, if you choose to make this pitiful subject town-talk, and the name of your dead parents a byword. If you think that is how you can best honour them, ask Doyle by all means. Ask old Pennington too; he is even better than Doyle at probing into other men's business, and then

laying it open to be piously discussed and ridiculed. Oh! ask them all. Ask Foster; he may not be such a fool as people call him. He may even suggest that his mother protects and pities you, and his sisters bestow their generous patronage on the girl who owns a questionable name! Oh! tell them all—if you think *that* better than being an equal among them, as you are now. But, my dear,” added Nuel, with a sudden change of tone, and as if he feared the words that might pass her lips if he gave her time to speak at all, “it would be useless to ask any of them. I have tried many times, and so skilfully that, if they had known anything, I must have discovered it. No, no one knows, my darling, and, by my will, no one ever shall know, beyond yourself and me. And when I have given you that test of my love—— What is it, dear?”

“I am going on,” said Nora, as she offered him her hand “You have said all now, haven’t you? I’m going on to Rachel, as I told you. No, I would rather you didn’t come. There is no need to say more to me to-day; I know it all. I know it as if we had—had stood here for weeks, talking of it all the time. I shall never stand just here again, I hope, as long as I live. Come, Bran.”

Blind as he was in his passion for her, Nuel Armstrong was yet too shrewd not to see that he would injure his own cause if he forced his companionship upon her longer; so he bade her good-bye quietly, and forbore to add one other word.

So full was the girl’s heart that, when Mrs. Corr met her just within the silent cabin, and, reading some new sorrow in her face, put her arms about her and kissed her—just as she used to do when she was a child,—Nora hid her eyes upon the woman’s shoulder, and sobbed out one breathless question.

“Miss Nora,” said Rachel, stepping back from the girl’s clinging touch, while she spoke fast and nervously, “what cruel, false ideas have been put into your head? I knew you first—first of them all,—and, if there’d been wrong to know, I should have known it. My dear, you were a baby then; but you were fatherless and motherless—poor little one! Why—why do you try to bring a worse sorrow into your life, my child?”

“Is there no worse, Rachel?”

The tears stood still in her questioning eyes, and Rachel looked away from them.

“I know most and best, my dear,” she said, “and you never can have any name but Nora St. George. Isn’t it pretty enough? And”—more hurriedly still—“what could have put such dreams into your head, Miss Nora, dear, and you so rich and happy now and going to have such a beautiful life?”

“Then, after all,” said Nora, with a smile upon her tremulous lips, “I may have my happy summer?”

CHAPTER XXIX.

Beauty and light and joy are everywhere.

The Curse of Kehama.

ONE of the prettiest river-side gardens on the north bank of the Upper Thames, and a party assembled there, as radiant and as varied as the myriad flowers among which they sat or strolled. A beautiful picture it was, not only for the fresh young eyes that had never looked upon its like before, but even for the tired ones which had been satiated with brilliance. For, beyond the little crowd of idle human forms, the river flowed in wide and calm serenity; upon the dazzling flower-banks fell the cool shadows of rare old oaks and elms; and even the dresses caught a new loveliness among the roses on the velvet turf.

The latest guests had been welcomed in the shadowy drawing room, and led through the open windows to the wide terrace, where games and partners were being chosen; and now Mrs. Pennington, skilfully concealing the fact that she was in an irrepressible flutter of excitement, went from one to another of the little groups of elder guests already scattered among the shady, tempting seats; though, while she talked with each for a time, in her easy, gentle way, she was seeking one familiar face.

"My dear," observed her husband, speaking low, as he passed her, fulfilling—just as easily, and just as gently, and just as well as she did—his own part in this new scheme, "your old friend Mrs. Brunton is in the rose-tent, by the river. She would like a few minutes' chat with you alone, I'm sure, after your long separation."

Mrs. Pennington nodded, with a smile of relief, and hastened her steps a little, taking up her long silk skirts by force of habit, and then dropping them swiftly, with a sudden remembrance and a hectic flush. They were very fashionable skirts, and the bonnet that surmounted them was very fashionable too; but Mrs. Pennington—so she was always careful to impress upon her daughter—chose everything she wore for its "comfort." Fortunately, nothing out of the fashion or unbecoming ever felt "comfortable" to Mrs. Pennington.

"I fancied you would reach this spot eventually," was the smiling greeting she received, as she entered the rose-tent and took her seat beside her old school-friend; your husband guessed I should like a few minutes with you alone. How delightful it will be to have you in London for a time, Cis! I don't think I ever was so surprised in my life as when I read your letter, which was awaiting me on my return yesterday. I have not quite accepted the story even yet."

"Nor have I," smiled Mrs. Pennington, in her companion's

pause. "I cannot even yet believe in Nora's fortune, and can scarcely realise the fact that this house is our present home."

"How beautiful it is!" said Mrs. Brunton, glancing around her. "And so exquisitely arranged both within and without! Some one with perfect taste must have selected it for you, Cis."

"Mr. Poyntz did that. He says he chanced to hear of it at once, and had no trouble at all; so I expect he knew the best agents to apply to, as neither Mr. Doyle nor my husband would have known. We have taken it for the summer. I fancy Nora will wish to go abroad after that."

"She likes the house, of course?"

"Likes it!" echoed the Vicar's wife, with a smile. "She seems happy here beyond all words. She enters into everything with the freshest and heartiest enjoyment; and yet, with all her merriment, she is so wonderfully soothing. If it is impossible to be dull or depressed in Nora's company, it is equally impossible to be either chafed or weary."

"No wonder that you look upon her as a daughter."

"No, indeed. The only wonder is that she is so glad to be thought so. No one ever could learn from Nora that I was not mistress of this house and of every pound that we spend. And she would not consent to anything but an equal allowance for herself and Celia. Celia was overpowered at first, and could not believe such wealth was really hers; but she was soon infected with Nora's delight."

"Is Nora changed by the change in her position?"

"Not in the slightest," said Mrs. Pennington, with a laugh. "She just goes on in her old independent, happy, gravely-merry way. I'm sure you could never guess what was the last thing in which she invested. A violin! Yes, you may well smile. She never plays it except in her own room; but I often listen, and, though she is only feeling her way, as it were, and finding out tunes without learning the instrument, you have no idea how pretty it is. She has a concertina too, but I think the violin is the favourite."

"But she plays the piano, surely?"

"Not to content herself, so she never plays to strangers. She plays to herself sometimes, but never really practises, as Celia does, and as girls *must* do nowadays, if they would keep up with the age. She says everyone she hears plays better than she does, so she loses her interest in it. She sings beautifully, though, so it does not greatly signify."

"I think not," said Mrs. Brunton, with laughing emphasis. "Why, Cis, she is even more lovely than report has made me fancy! And that is not usual, for facts lose little in the telling, do they? Her beauty has a most wonderful charm, too, which I cannot yet define. I felt to-day, when I looked into her face,

as if it were a book I longed to read and study, and as if I could enjoy the study hour after hour. Can you understand?"

"Yes. Is that Miss Foster standing by the target, looking round?"

"Yes; I did not know she was here, and I almost wonder at your asking her," said the London lady, a little chillingly. "While Nora St. George was at Great Cumberland Place, I never saw her but once—and that was merely by chance—so little did the Fosters care to give her change or pleasure. They literally buried her in that old school-room for the entire year; and so I wonder that Miss St. George cares for their society now."

"She does not," confessed the Vicar's wife, honestly. "I have had the very hardest work in the world, and failed so far, to persuade Nora to visit them. If she ever does—and they are bent upon our going to a dance of theirs to-morrow—it will be simply to please me and Celia. You see, young Mr. Foster was so long with us, and his sister having visited us too, and Mr. Foster having been a college friend of my husband's, makes us wish to keep up a friendly intercourse. And then Gena Foster is so very urbane to Nora now, and seeks her out so indefatigably, that I think perhaps it will be all right soon."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Brunton, trying to mention as a surmise what she knew to be a certainty, "Miss St. George is *now* to be considered as a suitable wife for the young curate, and to be cultivated accordingly. And probably," she continued, with a little additional acumen, as her eyes were directed towards a group approaching from the target, "a slight hastening of the match, if that be possible, would be a wise step under existing circumstances. How long have you known Mr. Poynz?"

Though surprised a little at the abrupt question, Mrs. Pennington answered without hesitation; and all the more quickly because Mr. Poynz was one of the group coming towards them.

"Well, bear this in mind, Cis," continued the elder lady, in a whisper; "I'm more of a woman of the world than you are, and, beyond that, I'm familiar enough to be almost in the confidence of each party. Genevieve Foster's one aim and desire is to be admired; never mind ulterior motives at this moment. Now and then her eyes have been tardily opened to the fact that another girl could be as attractive as herself; and Miss Foster has not assisted to make life a bed of roses for that girl. But the effort she is making to win her way *now* is stronger than all her other efforts put together, and whoever stands in her way will not be spared. Ah, Celia, I am glad to see you, dear! How you seem to be enjoying this first season of yours! I and your mother have been having a chat about old times."

"But Mrs. Pennington," said Miss Foster, looking innocently about her, while the Vicar's wife recovered from the fluttering state of admiration into which she had been thrown by the

adroit disjunction of her friend's last sentences, "where are Nora and Willoughby? Not with you? I suppose they have gone wandering off together somewhere. It always used to be the same at home; we never could find Nora and Will."

"When I came down here," observed Mrs. Brunton, holding her hand to Mr. Poynz for a fading rose which he had idly gathered as he stood, "Miss St. George was impressing frankly upon a party of croquet-players that she did not understand croquet, and would not on any account spoil the game by joining it. Probably the gentlemen did not believe her, for they would not take her refusal or let her escape."

"She really cannot play," put in Celia, "and she is never ashamed to say what she cannot do."

"But of course you noticed," said Miss Foster, with her surface smile, that Willoughby was not in that game. Now, Celia, like a good girl, confess where they are, because I want so particularly to win her promise to come to our ball to-morrow. Mrs. Pennington *you* will come?" she added, while Celia slipped away unobserved (as she thought) to seek Nora and prepare her for this pressing invitation.

"Yes, I will come if Nora does."

"You must tell Nora," smiled Genevieve, bending to whisper it playfully, and half aloud, in her slow sibilant tones, that Willoughby stays with us over to-morrow night. She will not refuse *then*."

"Beauty is very often eccentric, like genius," observed Mrs. Brunton, placidly; "for I remember that your brother was one of the most eager in trying to make her join that game of croquet—on his side."

"Still she felt pretty sure," said Genevieve, un baffled "that he would leave it when she did. Mrs. Pennington, will you ask Mr. Poynz"—with a playful backward glance into his face—"to take Celia and myself up the river a little way in your boat, some time to-day?"

"I will take you all," replied Mark, readily, but I must take you one by one. It's a trifling condition, considering how low the tide is, and how high the thermometer."

By this time Celia had found Nora busily playing Badminton, but the game was ended just then, and Nora left her place instantly at Celia's quiet summons.

"I wasn't very stupid at that," she said, shaking her head, with a laugh when they walked away. "I suppose a long solitary course of a home-made battledore and shuttlecock on the bog, years ago, paved the way for this. Oh, Celia, isn't everything pleasant? Where's Mr. Foster?"

"I don't know," replied Celia, never guessing that Nora had hoped that he was with her, but only recalling Miss Foster's words: "I should have thought you would know. Gena is with

manma, though—and that's why I came for you, Nora. She wants a promise that we will all go to her ball to-morrow, and I was afraid you might refuse hastily, and be sorry afterwards."

"No, I should not be sorry afterwards,"

"But Nora, you will go?" pleaded Celia, with a little heightening of her usual colour.

"No, never! She was unkind a whole year—I don't mean to myself. I wouldn't think much of that, for it isn't worth it—but to Miss Archer who had nothing in her life but work or loneliness and—— No, I must not think of it," she added, suddenly, especially when the Fosters are here. But—but, if they could have told me where she is now—if they had only taken even *that* interest in her, and not let her fade out of all our lives, and think that no one cared for her! I was going to work and help her; and, now that I could help her so easily, I may not. Oh, how could they let her hear I was rich, and yet forget to give her my letter, and let her go where we cannot find her?"

"Oh, we will find her!" said Celia, in her staid, soothing way. "Mr. Foster promised to get the address, you know."

He promised, but he has never done it. Men ought to keep their word always—even if women don't.

"What is the difference?" asked Celia, gently. "Besides, Will is sure to succeed at last. He is so very anxious to do what he can to please—you, Nora."

Something in the tone struck Nora sadly.

"Will is very good," she said, quite honestly, "and likes to please us all."

"And you will go to-morrow?" pleaded Celia, returning hopefully to her charge. "Miss Foster is so particularly gracious to you."

"What is *gracious*?" questioned Nora, thoughtfully. "Do you mean sorry about Helen Archer, or about—anything?"

"She seeks you out constantly," pursued Celia, avoiding any direct reply to the last question; "and it looks ungenerous in you to hold back, now you are a more important person than she is; and of course you need never be more than just friendly. You know papa and Mr. Foster were such old friends; and mamma does so wish you to be friendly, Nora, because, you see, Will was like one of us at home for so long."

"I will go," said Nora, quietly. "If you all wish it, that's quite enough, for you have been very kind to me. But I will not promise what I either will or will not say to Genevieve Foster."

"Oh, no fear of your offending her!" smiled Celia. "Now, Nora, will you go on alone to the rose-tent, because I don't want them to know I fetched you, and they would see us in another minute."

So, when the little group in the rose-tent heard an advancing step, and looked round, expecting Celia's return, the figure that

they saw alone, looked so different from Celia's, that probably that was why their eyes rested so long upon it.

"Nora," exclaimed Will Foster, pondering what it was which struck him afresh each time he saw her, "what an exquisite dress yours is! And—surely I can never have seen you in a bonnet before to-day?"

"Is it a bonnet?" asked Mr. Poynz, examining, in his leisurely way, a matchless white result of millinery skill and taste.

"Does it make me look different?" asked Nora, with anxious eyes. "I was afraid so, when Mrs. Pennington laughed at me and called me *gorgeous*. I didn't want it to be showy at all: and when Celia tried it on it looked so quiet and pretty."

"Is it possible?" queried Mark, sceptically. "And did Miss Pennington try on the dress? And did that look quiet—and even pretty?"

"Of course my dress couldn't look little and nice, like Celia's," said Nora, laughing, "though we thought they were the same. Don't I recall to your mind Barbara Allen's last request, 'Oh, make it long and narrow'?"

"I suppose by now, Miss St. George," observed Mrs. Brunton, looking up at her, "you are getting used to being a good deal looked at—in the park especially."

"Nora likes the park," laughed Will, without understanding the proud little flush in Nora's cheeks, "though she did tell me once, in confidence, that it was something like going round and round the board in a game of steeple-chase, and that the people did not look a bit more lively than the tin horsemen."

"Still I like it," said Nora, lightly. "I can often see little poems and histories there; and then the park itself is always beautiful."

"And the costumes," added Mark.

"And the costumes—yes. One of the many things which I shall never understand is, why the ladies who can wear such marvellous costumes do not look happier in the face."

"When you have a leisure afternoon to give me," said Mark, "I will drive you where you will see hundreds of happy faces—if you don't mind many of them belonging to poor, hard-working people."

"I mind!" cried Nora, with laughter in her eyes. "Haven't I been as poor as any of them? And am I different now in any way, except that—that money was found for me? I shall be very glad to go."

"Will it be where people like ourselves go, Mr. Poynz?" inquired Genevieve Foster.

"People very like ourselves will be there when we go," laughed Mark, "but perhaps not many of the 'upper ten,' Miss Foster."

"Oh! Celia," said Nora, with a sigh of real pleasure, "aren't you glad *we* are not in the 'upper ten'?"

"Suppose you woke some day and found you were?" interrogated Mark, looking curiously into Nora's face.

"I should try to go to sleep again."

"No, you would not," he contradicted. "You have had a far greater surprise than that, and you fit your third destiny as easily and well as you did your first and second. If the next is a higher one, you will fit it just as gracefully."

"I am sure so," said Will, more with boyish enthusiasm than a skilful choice of words. "Whatever you are, Nora, you will be the fashion; won't she, Celia? Everybody talks of her."

"It is a pity," said Miss Foster, slowly, as she pressed the stick of her parasol into the turf, "for any English lady to be talked about."

"Yes," assented Nora, readily, "so please don't talk about me."

"Oh! Mrs. Pennington," cried Genevieve, with a sudden change of tone, as the two elder ladies came from their rose-covered seats, "you have promised to bring Nora and Celia to our dance to-morrow, haven't you?"

"I would rather not, thank you," began Nora, impulsively; but then Celia's words came back to her, and Mrs. Pennington's eyes persuaded her; and so she said, in that grave, simple way of hers, "I wished at first not to come, Miss Foster, so perhaps you would rather withdraw your invitation?"

"Oh! certainly not. And, as Willoughby is staying, I am sure you have changed your mind."

"I haven't changed my mind at all," said Nora, meeting Miss Foster's chilly, smiling gaze; "but, as Mrs. Pennington wishes it, I will change my decision, and go with her to Great Cumberland Place."

Something in the tone in which the last words were uttered made Celia sorry for the moment that she had tempted Nora to this decision; but in the next instant this was forgotten, for she was walking up the garden at Will's side, and there were no pauses in his lively discourse.

"Miss Nora," said Mark, skilfully managing to loiter at her side behind the rest of the party, "Doyle has commissioned me to get you a pair of ponies to drive, if you will care for them."

"Oh! yes," cried Nora, with delight. "But—am to drive them *only* in the park?"

"I should never drive them there, if I were you; but of course you will take them where you choose. What a large party you have to-day!"

"To most of these friends *you* introduced us," said Nora, "so we owe their acquaintanceship to you."

"But you do not owe to me the zeal with which they follow up the introduction, and widen the circle every day. I wish you would never say you owe anything to me."

"Why?" asked Nora, puzzled a little.

"I will tell you why another day," said Mark, with a change of tone, "when I have—as you said to me upon the bog one Sunday night—*gone in* for the widest leap of all. Do you remember?"

"*Did I say it?*" questioned Nora, blushing. "I'm very glad I don't remember."

"Yes. You said, too, on that very same night, that you remembered everything. Yet you see I have eclipsed you, for I remember every word you said to me, both on the night and ever since."

"You must have had a great, great many blank pages in your memory, Mr. Poyntz," said Nora, with a smile; but her eyes were soft and liquid, and her lips were just a little unsteady in the smile.

"I had, but they are all filled now; and there is not one which I would consent to part with."

CHAPTER XXX.

As his prisoner there he kept her.

Percy's Reliques.

She answered kindly, but beyond appeal,
No sort of hope for 'me.

BROWNING.

THE games had been lost and won. The long, pleasant, dilatory meal, which Mrs. Pennington had already learned to call "high tea"—and which was a necessary adjunct to her garden parties, because the guests lingered on, and would have famished on strawberries and champagne alone—was over; and now those guests who had not left were resting in the seats upon the terrace, talking quietly and idly, as they looked down upon the river, flowing softly on, beyond the trees and the arches and the colonnades of roses.

"Nora," whispered Willoughby Foster, stopping her as she crossed the terrace, after fetching a book which Mrs. Brunton wished to see, "I've brought a new cord for the rudder of your boat. You will come with me to put it on, won't you?"

"Of course," assented Nora, promptly. "Did you forget you had it until now?"

For some reason or other Will did not answer this question, as they walked down to the river; and, looking at him, anyone would have judged his thoughts to be much more upon the state of the tide than upon the cord he had brought from the house. The little boat was out upon the water this evening, swaying softly and enticingly upon the incoming current.

"Sit in your own place for one moment, Nora," young Foster

said, "while I stand here upon the steps and run the cord through; then you can judge of its length."

He took her hand, and held it until she was comfortable in her seat; and then he put the rope through the rudder and laid the two ends in her lap.

"Just try it for two minutes," he said; and, stepping down into the boat, he put off from shore without a pause. But he coloured painfully when he met Nora's questioning, laughing glance, for she evidently thought just then that the unmooring of the boat had been a mistake.

"Two minutes!" she said, presently, as he pulled hard against the tide, with his head bent and his lips closed. "We have been twice two minutes, Mr. Foster."

"Isn't it a lovely evening?" he asked her, hurriedly; "and lovelier upon the water than anywhere. I will take you back in a few minutes, Nora; but let me have a taste of exercise, and you a taste of rest."

So, not at all unwillingly in the calm summer evening-time, she leaned back in her cushioned seat, and looked around upon the peaceful scene on which the slanting sun-rays lingered; and she never noticed how hard and fast Will Foster worked for his own purpose. But when at last he laid down his sculls, and the boat began to drift slowly homewards with the current, her eyes were suddenly opened to the new intense earnestness upon his usually happy face.

"You are not a very clever oarsman," she said quietly, though her heart began to beat as she remembered how fast he had brought her from home, and how she had involuntarily allowed him to do so, while she dreamed the time away; "not at all clever indeed, Mr. Foster, or you would keep your sculls and sit back upon your seat."

"I don't want to seem clever this evening, even to you," returned Will, with rather a forced smile. "I want to seem only what I am, Nora—very much in earnest, dear, in what I am going to say to-night, because I've so often tried and failed."

"Please fail this time too."

"I cannot," he said, and his hands were tightly clasped as he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. "My heart is too full to-night to be silent. Nora, I love you so dearly that surely you will give me one little promise to care for me in return. I cannot expect such love as I feel for you—though even that may come in time—but promise me you will try to care for me a little, Nora."

"I do," responded the girl, gravely. "I care for you a little now—more than a little, for I can never forget what companions we were years ago, both in mischief and out of mischief, or how you have been my friend ever since—but I can never care for you more than I do to-night; and that is only as a friend."

"But you will feel differently, Nora darling. Sure y—surely you will accept me some day?"

"I shall never change to you, Will," she said, very gently. "I am as sure that I shall never like you *more*, as I am that I shall never like you *less*. Please let things be as they are. Life is so pleasant now."

"But things cannot always be as they are," cried Will with rising vehemence. "It is not to be supposed that you will not marry—you of all girls."

"I cannot yet; perhaps I never can."

Nora said it with a strange, quiet sadness, and her face had grown very white. But, when she met her companion's blank incredulous gaze, she smiled a little, and her own friendly, easy manner came slowly back to her.

"Of course you will marry!" persisted Will. "Why, every body wants you now!"

"I shall not marry everybody."

"I'm sure," the young man went on heavily, "no one could be so devoted to you as I am, and have been since—I was going to say since I went back to Ireland and found you grown up—but—but I declare," he added ruefully, "I don't believe I can remember a time when I was not devoted to you."

"I do. I remember when you wouldn't carry little Larry Hogan home from Fintona on your back, *though* I asked you."

"I cannot laugh," fretted Will, "even at the memory of that truant day of ours, when we stumbled across little Larry in the dark as we came home. No, I remember I wouldn't carry him, for he was a muddy little object; but I would now, Nora, at the slightest hint of yours, and in my best clothes too. Do listen, dear, and tell me you will try and like me enough to marry me. Don't always jest."

"I don't think I always jest," said Nora, while, lighted by one swift ray of thought, she saw not only her isolated youth, but a possibility of a shunned and isolated age. "I am not jesting now. But see how pleasantly we glide with the stream. You could not change the boat's course without making everything less pleasant, could you? So why should we disturb it?"

"But just look your future seriously in the face, Nora dear," pleaded the young curate, his voice full of trouble. "In the natural course of things your solitary drifting will be disturbed, as you say. So why not choose now who shall—"

"Disturb it?" put in Nora, laughing, though her cheeks again had grown very pale. "No, not this summer, please."

"I have loved you always," reiterated Will, going back to his one strong argument, "though since you have been rich I have not liked to tell you."

"I thought not," returned Nora, demurely; "so you are trying now, just to please me. But I like silence best."

"If I keep silence, some other fellow—"

"I should not listen if he did," said Nora, with a simple assurance which solaced him infinitely. "I want this summer for—myself."

"Nora, do you really mean this?" whispered young Foster, after he had moored the boat at the garden-steps, and was offering her his hand. "Will no one be—be more successful than I have been, until you have had all this summer as a holiday?"

"No; no one."

"Well, I'm thankful for that at any rate," he said, with a sigh of great relief. "What's the matter, darling? Cold? What a selfish bear I have been to keep you out upon the water in that thin dress! Who would guess, after my carelessness, that I loved you so dearly?"

"Oh, Will," breathed Nora, with intense earnestness, "there is so much happier a life possible for you, if you could only see."

"I shall see you to-morrow—you promised to come?" he questioned, hastily, as he feared each moment would be their last together.

"Would it not be better for me not to go?"

"If you did not, I should not stay there; though I dare say there will be no getting near you in any case. Oh, Nora," he said, the trouble coming back to his voice, "I cannot give you up! I felt so confident of winning you—in time, at any rate. I'm sure they all think at home that you will accept me; so does Celia. And I'm sure Mr. Poynz does."

"Does he?" questioned Nora, very quietly.

"Yes, I'm sure he does. He always knew how I loved you, and he hoped you would marry me."

"Did he tell you he—hoped it?"

"Often," asserted Will, his thoughts far away from Mark as he spoke, and quite unconscious of the weight of his words. "Oh, dear, how soon we have reached them all again!"

"*On the water!*" repeated Genevieve Foster, with a laugh, as Nora accounted for her absence to Mrs. Pennington. "Without a shawl too, and so late! Well, I always did say Will could persuade you into anything."

"Except *into the water.*" rejoined Nora, quietly.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LYSANDER.—Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
 Could ever hear by tale or history,
 The course of true love never did run smooth.

HERMIA.—If, then, true lovers have been ever cross'd,
 It stands as an edict in destiny;
 * * * It is a customary cross;
 As due to love as thoughts, and dreams, and sighs,
 Wishes, and tears.

YOUNG Foster's prophetic complaint that he should not be able to get near Nora, if she did not keep her promise and go to his mother's ball, seemed to him fulfilled, when he looked eagerly about the rooms, after his imperative duties as gentleman of the house had been accomplished. Since he had received Mrs. Pennington's party on their arrival, he had only now and then caught a passing glimpse of Nora, and had been obliged to rest satisfied with that during his duty dances, and while he performed—good humouredly, if not patiently—the necessary task of introducing suitable partners, and luring congenial idlers into each other's society. But now the weight of this responsibility was lifted, and Will set out on his search for Nora. There was not an unlimited area to search, but there were numerous interruptions to be encountered; so that the dance which he had hoped to obtain had begun before he reached the spot where he had last seen Nora resting. He could therefore only stand and watch her through the quadrille, his round, unclouded eyes very full of admiration as they rested on her, and of amiable envy when they were directed towards her partner.

"I don't believe Poynz hates dancing so much as he pretends," he said to himself, with a smile. "I remember well his telling me that no man in his senses danced in June; yet there he is, not looking bored at all. But," added Will, meditatively, "I don't see how any one *could* be bored with Nora. Even if she doesn't utter a word, her eyes are always speaking. I wish this stupid dance were over."

Even when the "stupid dance" was over, there was little consolation for Will. He saw Nora claimed from Mr. Poynz before they had crossed the room after the quadrille, and he bit his lip with vexation as he made his way to Mark.

"It's too bad of Nora," he began, with his usual honest monopoly of interest. "Had she promised Graham the next dance?"

"Yes."

"Yet she would not engage herself to me for any special ones; she would promise me only the first I asked her for, *if she* should

happen to be disengaged. I see no chance of that now. I believe she did it on purpose."

"Why should you believe that?" inquired Mark, as his eyes followed the different couples going past to take their places for the dance.

"I wish I could tell you," replied Will, longing for the relief which it had always been to him to tell his personal grievances to this one friend; "but you would be bored more than by dancing."

"Impossible."

"Or you would laugh, and that I could not stand just now."

"Then I know what you mean without your telling," put in Mark, in his quiet, leisurely way. "You have been assuring Miss St. George that no other man in the world adores her as you do, or is so capable of adoring her; that no one else would lead such a miserable life without her as you would lead, or be so deliriously happy as you would be if—Pooh! it's the old formula. I know it well enough without your telling me."

"But—step aside with me a moment, Poynz—you have no idea how strange she was; I really could not understand her," added poor Will, his face falling as he recalled those anxious minutes through which he and Nora had drifted with the stream. "She did not seem as if she intended ever to marry, or change the life she is living now. Of course that is an impossible idea, isn't it, Poynz? She will have other offers presently, and so, I suppose, gradually that childish notion will pass away. But I hope and trust she will remember who was her first lover, and who first asked her for her love. Then I shall not care."

"For what?"

"For having been kept waiting, or even for having been once refused. Nora is still very childish in many things, and perhaps she has the childish fancy that, if she were engaged, she would not feel so utterly unfettered in her enjoyment as she does now. That is the only way I can explain it to myself. What do you think?"

"That Miss St. George acts thoughtfully in everything, whatever her 'childish fancies' may be. If she has declined your hand, Will, I see no prospect of her changing towards you when another man offers her his. That other men *will* offer it, we who know her can safely guess; but to each one I think she will speak only the truth, however her gentleness may try to soften it. And so, however cruel that truth would be to hear, I should accept it, and hide the smart."

"You mean if you were I?"

"Decidedly I mean if I were you. You asked me what I thought, you know. I'm sorry you did: I'm sorry you told me this at all."

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Mark, with a ring of contempt in his voice, "because a man should carry his heart within him, and fight his——"

Mark broke off abruptly here, for one glance into young Foster's face had reminded him of the difference between their natures, and of the fact that, eagerly as Will sought sympathy in everything, Mark himself was the only friend from whom he had sought it on this one subject which was nearest to his heart.

"We all venture a heavy stake when we give our heart into a girl's keeping," he said, lightly, "and our eyes are open to the chances of loss. We stand them voluntarily, and we have only ourselves to blame for our defeat."

"I expected you to say when we 'make fools of ourselves by falling in love,'" observed Will, with rather a grim smile. "But you have not lately spoken so cynically of love as you did some time ago."

"Did I?" inquired Mark, negligently. "Or have you mistaken the subject a little? Don't you think the dance is nearly over now?"

"It's sure to be. Thank you for reminding me, for I should have gone on mooning here. I wish I could be as indifferent and independent as you are, Poynz—I do indeed," he said, pathetically; "but it is impossible to give up Nora after having loved her so long, and feeling so sure she cared for me too. I'm afraid we ought not to have shirked this dance, you and I, but it has been a relief to tell you—even," added Will, honestly, "though you have not helped me at all."

Without looking after him, Mark sauntered on, to choose a partner for the next dance if he must, to take refuge in a cooler spot if he might. With all his love and eagerness written on his face, Will came up at last to where Nora sat resting for a few moments on Mrs. Pennington's couch, and laughingly shaking her head to all the entreaties for her card.

"It is quite filled except the last line," she said, with a frank nonchalance which is rather rare in ball-room experience, "and I want to leave out that dance."

"For me?" interrogated Will, excitedly.

"No: I mean leave that out altogether; because, unless Celia is enjoying herself very much, we are going home after the last but one. Still, if Celia wishes it, we shall stay, and then I may as well dance it as not."

"Then promise it to me, Nora, and I will stand my chance."

"No," she refused, with a persistency which amused even herself, "I would rather not."

So, gradually, those who had waited for her promise moved away, seeing no prospect of it; and, though Will's triumph was beyond bounds when he first discovered that she had re-

served the next dance for him, it was sobered a good deal by the further discovery that she intended to give him only that one.

"I wish it could last all night, as it is the only one we are to dance together," he whispered, when they stopped.

"How tired we should be—both of the dance and of each other! Look, Mr. Foster! Isn't Celia pretty to-night? She is always pretty; but I mean, doesn't she look very pretty now."

"I don't know," Will answered, moodily, as he felt that in another minute or two she would have left him. "Come and see if there is a little air on the stairs; I cannot criticise anybody."

"You never were an observant character," remarked Nora, standing against the banisters, and using her fan with unconscious coquetry, as she looked about with her lovely, untired eyes.

"You insinuate that the fact was established in your mind long ago, dear."

"So it was. The fact—like the business of a certain shoemaker in the Tottenham Court Road—has been 'established from time immemorial.'"

"Really, Nora," laughed Will, as he stood before her, with eyes for nothing beyond her face, "Why should you ever notice common things like that? No one would believe it who looked at you to-night; you look so perfectly lovely."

"Celia's dress is exactly the same," put in Nora, carelessly watching Genevieve Foster as she came from the drawing-room alone.

"I don't believe it," asserted Will, bluntly, "except in its being white." And by that time his sister had come up, and playfully touched him on the shoulder.

"You two are always together," she said, without lowering her voice, "and always have some quiet little joke between yourselves. I suppose none of us may share it. Look how we come straggling up! Tory, isn't it too bad that Willoughby and Nora have always some nice little jest which they will not let us share?"

"You may share it, Miss Foster," said Nora, her gaze full and clear upon Genevieve's smiling face. "Very few jests bear repeating, though, even when they are born in the purple, and ours was not. It had its origin in the Tottenham Court Road. Do you happen to know that rustic promenade?"

"Scarcely—as a promenade," replied Genevieve, trying to look amused, but succeeding only in looking supercilious. "For a lady, Miss St. George, you have certainly shown yourself extraordinarily fond of curious and questionable localities. Your few weeks' experience of London ought to put residents like ourselves to the blush. Don't you think so, Tory? Mr. Poynz, can you imagine what benefit or pleasure such experience would have for Miss St. George?"

"It has had none *yet*," said Nora, calmly intercepting his reply, and very steadily now meeting Genevieve's shallow smile. "I have tried to meet Miss Archer, and, as you know, I have never succeeded."

"Very possible indeed," assented Miss Foster, coldly. "If Miss Archer had not particularly wished to be lost sight of, she would have sought you, I've no doubt, considering how you always singled her out as your most valued friend. So you may be very sure that she has a reason for keeping herself in the background. If, therefore, the motive for your eccentric walks and drives is to discover *her*, let me advise you to discontinue them."

"Surely, Nora," put in Victoria Foster, marvelling at Nora's evident determination to be silent, "you must feel very glad that we never told her of your being rich; for now you have had your eyes opened to her real nature. If she had known you were wealthy, she would have kept up the acquaintanceship indefinitely, and you would never have suspected her of time-serving, and of not being what she seemed."

"Sometimes," said Nora, looking from one sister to the other, with a glance almost of amusement in her beautiful eyes, "it is pleasanter to know each other only as what we *seem*. As for Helen Archer, I love her too well to argue in her favour here. I would mention her name only where it is remembered gratefully and tenderly, as I myself remember it."

"No one who ever knew Miss Archer could remember her but with pleasure and respect," put in Mark, coolly, and looking a little amused at the glad swift smile which chased the short-lived scorn from Nora's lips. Then he stood back, while a gentleman hurried up to claim her for the dance that was just beginning.

"I don't really mind Nora's peculiarities at all," said Genevieve, addressing Mr. Poyntz in a low voice, as she passed into the drawing room at his side, and glancing up at him with a smile as she spoke, "but girls who are likely to become sisters at no distant date get into an honest, friendly way of speaking now and then. You would understand, Mr. Poyntz, if you had sisters of your own."

"Should I? I never remember desiring any sisters of my own."

"We shall be very glad to welcome Nora among us," continued Miss Foster, wondering a little uncomfortably at his reply, while still she could cautiously pursue her own course, "because she has really some good qualities when you know her pretty well. At any rate Will is sure she has, and we are quite willing to take him on trust."

"Whether or not your brother is so inexpressibly fortunate as to win Miss St. George for his wife, Miss Foster," Mark said, proudly, but very earnestly, "you have no need to take on trust the noble and charming qualities which the very dullest of us must see that she possesses. Miss Pennington had promised me

this dance, and I see her now. Ours is the next, is it not? Ha! I did not know that Dr. Armstrong was to be here to-night."

"He was not sure he would be in London," explained Genevieve, with a triumphant glance across the room at her sister, "but I fancied he would arrange it somehow. How late he is, though!"

If during the early part of the evening Will Foster had, as he said, found it hard to get near Nora, Nuel Armstrong, after his late arrival, found it far harder. Wherever Nora paused between the dances, a little crowd seemed closely to gather about her.

"Never mind, dear, you will not find it so except at a dance," whispered Mrs. Pennington, wasting her consolation, for Nora enjoyed it all. "It is the penalty you pay for dancing so perfectly, and looking—as you look."

So dance after dance went on, and Dr. Armstrong sought Nora in vain, and hid his discomfiture as he best could, while he suavely repaid Victoria Foster's endeavours to entertain him. But, when the ball was nearly over, he followed her and her partner to their place in the quadrille, and stood there to demand the last dance. In all her surprise, Nora refused him very quietly and gently.

"I have declined that dance before," she said, the delicate colour deepening a little in her cheeks.

"Then I must claim the one after this," he persisted, below his breath. "It is the last but one; give me that, Nora."

"I cannot; I dance it with Mr. Poynz."

The opening bars of the figure were played before Doctor Armstrong had turned away, and just then Celia started a little at her partner's side, for she had caught Nuel's angry, menacing glance.

"Is the last for me, too?" asked Mark, when the dance was over, and he and Nora stood resting in the open doorway.

And then she blushed a little, because it had been in the vague anticipation of that very question that she had kept herself free for the last dance—until Nuel's demand had made it impossible for her to join it.

"I cannot dance that at all now," she said, simply, "even if we stay. I would like to, but I refused Doctor Armstrong, so I must refuse everybody."

"As you refused Foster at supper-time. Why was that?"

"Because his sister took it so thoroughly for granted that I would not."

"That's a sublime reason."

"Don't Celia and Mr. Foster dance well together?" inquired Nora, thoughtfully watching them. "Did you notice?"

"No."

"I think it will be so nice if they grow fond of each other."

"When we can arrange those things for each other," said

Mark, his dark cheeks reddening a little and his voice low and stern, "the world will go very smoothly and agreeably, I have no doubt. It is such a very easy matter to reduce loving into liking. Ask Will to-day—ask me presently, when I have learnt the lesson, and stand stricken by the blow. It is such an easy matter to tear a thousand clinging tendrils from a man's heart, and hide the scars they leave!"

"Mr. Poyntz," asked Nora, very low and wistfully, "who told you of—why do you speak so of Will to-night?"

"He told me," Mark answered. "We are old friends, and he told me of his disappointment."

"And you were sorry?"

"Very sorry—for him."

"And for me?"

"I don't know yet;" and, as he spoke—she looking at him—his gaze rested by chance upon Nuel Armstrong.

"I see," she said, her low pretty voice quickened by disdain. "You hesitate to say you are sorry, because you picture another fate for me."

"Doctor Armstrong has not a very brilliant expression of countenance to-night," observed Mark, lazily. "He looks as if he thought us all patients in a bad way."

"Victoria likes him."

"Miss Foster is a sensible and charming girl—far too wise to see suitors following and not look behind. What a happy thing it would be for us if girls universally acted so! There sweeps a glorious feeling of rest across a man's mind at only the bare idea of it."

"I should have thought that it would have been far less trouble for you when they did *not* look behind. You need not even be aware of their existence then."

"That," returned Mark, dryly, "is the one mistake we make. Doctor Armstrong sees you now, and will be here in a few minutes. My—my child, are you so tired? Do you wish to go home?"

"Oh, no!" said Nora, laying the swansdown of her fan against the cheek next him, as if to hide its sudden whiteness from the keen eyes above her, and quite determined not to leave while Celia Pennington was unequivocally enjoying herself. "But I have been thinking all the evening how I should like to go into the old school-room for a minute. I have never been there since Helen and I parted; and I may have no other opportunity, for I don't feel as if I should ever be here again."

"And you have not yet had the moment's freedom given you," said Mark, and he seemed only to be glancing idly into the rooms before him. "If you go now I will not let anyone follow you. No one is looking at this moment, Miss Norah. Run downstairs while you are safe. I will summon you if you stay too long;

but the rest will do you good. Not a moment too soon," he added, mentally, when he turned from watching Nora out of sight, and received the slow and formal bow of Doctor Armstrong.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Although men are accused for not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps as few know their own strength.

SWIFT.

ALWAYS anxious to avoid Dr. Armstrong when he could do so with ease, Mr. Poyntz turned away now, and sauntered into the drawing-room; but Nuel followed, with a quicker and quieter step, and, at the first opportunity, addressed him suavely—

"I miss my cousin, Miss St. George; do you happen to have seen her lately?"

"I had that pleasure within the last few minutes," Mark answered; "but she was tired, she told me, and would go away to rest."

"She had no appearance of fatigue, and I shall be glad to find her as quickly as I can. Of course, as she was with you, you know who took her away."

"Not myself," replied Mark, in his easy, courteous way, nor did I follow her, as she told me she wished for rest."

With no evidence of having at all comprehended the hint conveyed in those last words, Dr. Armstrong turned back to the lobby, and Mark—without glancing again in his direction—passed on, in the margin of the dance, to where Mrs. Pennington sat, in the inner room.

"If you wish to leave, Mrs. Pennington," he said, taking a seat beside her, "I will order your carriage."

"I am quite ready," she answered, turning full willingly from a cynical-looking old gentleman on her other side, "but I would not hurry the girls. Willoughby Foster has just been describing their enjoyment to me as 'immense.' I felt sure they would enjoy the dance, though I could not help being a little nervous as to Miss Foster's reception of Nora—and, indeed, Nora's treatment of Miss Foster. I am very unwilling for there to be any estrangement between the families," she went on, in his silence; "yet, I should not have urged Nora to come, had not Miss Foster been so bent upon having her. I don't care to go into her reasons, as Mrs. Brunton does—I never could understand motives that are not on the surface—but, though I am very fond of Willoughby, and wish to be fond of his family, I think Miss Foster would have shown more tact by leaving Nora alone. That is all she wishes. If they were unkind to her during her residence here, she never alludes to it; but she makes no secret, certainly, of wishing Genevieve to leave her to herself."

"This is Miss Nora's first ball, is it not?"

"Yes, but others are to follow for her, as of course you know, Mr. Poynz; and probably she will soon be tired of them. No one would imagine that possible to-night, though, looking at her," added the little lady, meditatively. "Nor, I think, would they easily guess that this was her first experience of such a scene. She seems to understand etiquette by intuition."

"The etiquette which needs to be taught," said Mark, quietly, "is but a poor substitute for natural grace and refinement."

"And I suppose," added Mrs. Pennington, with an affirmative nod, "that Nora could never have acquired by study that unconstrained and ease of hers which make people watch her so. I laughed just now when some one spoke of her as 'elegant.' I could not fit that word to Nora's unconscious grace. Did you ever notice, Mr Poynz, how curious it is to hear a stranger's new opinion of some one who has grown as familiar to us as ourselves?"

"Just as our own first impression comes back, sometimes to strike us oddly, long after it has been swallowed in knowledge."

"Yes, I have noticed that too. Now, Mr. Poynz, the dance is thinning; so if you will find Nora, and take her down, and kindly order the brougham, as you offered to do, I will get Will to bring me as well as Celia, and we will meet you there."

Mark had no need to go to the school-room to find Nora. To his great surprise he saw her enter the outer drawing-room just then, as if glad to have left her solitude; and, though Dr. Armstrong was close beside her, she stopped and began talking merrily to a group of young people just within the doorway. She put her hand within his arm in a moment, when he told her Mrs. Pennington had sent him to take her to the carriage, and said good night to Dr. Armstrong.

"You were soon tired of the school-room," Mark said, when she stood within the empty dining-room downstairs, out of the way and hearing of the guests passing to their carriages.

"Yes," she assented, as her eyes followed the figures on the stairs; "almost as tired as I often was last year, in the evenings, after Miss Archer had left."

"Dr. Armstrong seems to know his way about this house very well."

"Oh, yes; he was here so often; so very often."

"And Foster was always genial to him, I suppose—hospitable, as he is to-night?"

"Yes," replied Nora, wondering what cause Mr. Poynz had to speak sternly to her; "and so were they all—Victoria especially."

"Victoria especially? That's right. It is comfortable to feel that such a thing exists as a girl to whom love is acceptable."

"Do so few girls think it acceptable?" inquired Nora.

speaking languidly, as she looked out into the hall, with the very greatest appearance of interest."

"I have heard that a girl's idea of happiness is totally wrecked by the mention of love."

"Have you?"

A wide old lady in blue satin was toiling downstairs in advance of her three daughters—a forlorn hope which she had led bravely from many a lost field,—and Nora's eyes followed her from stair to stair, her interest concentrated upon the ample satin skirts, as Mark could plainly see.

"Suppose another man to-night—even now—told you what Foster told you yesterday, you would give him just the same answer, I suppose?"

"Mr. Foster told me so many things yesterday," Nora answered, negligently even yet, though the pink had deepened for a moment in her cheeks, and then suddenly died and left them white, "that I should not remember to give anyone else exactly the same answer. There comes Celia at last. How pleased she looks!"

"*She* appreciates Will, at any rate," observed Mark, hurrying over his words a little now.

"I appreciate him too," said Nora, gravely. "I only begged him to leave me my holiday summer without—without talking of serious things that were—utterly impossible. Who is detaining Celia on the stairs?"

"And, as I said before, if another man—myself, let us say—came to you to-morrow to talk of 'serious things,' you would ask him too—*What* should you ask me, Nora?"

She had lifted her head to answer him, and she did so steadily and quietly; but her eyes fell before that new light in his, and for an instant the whiteness of her face spread even to her lips.

"I should be so sorry. You have been the best and truest friend to me, and I could not have my happy summer unless you were my friend still."

"And after this summer holiday is over, Nora," he asked, his voice shaken by the great strength and yearning of his love, "may I tell you what would make life into one long summer holiday for me?"

Her eyes had grown soft and beautiful while he spoke to her in this new tone, and the pink came slowly back into her cheeks; but, while she laid the words softly in her heart, Dr. Armstrong came into sight upon the stairs.

"After this summer?" repeated Mark, bending to look questioningly into her eyes.

"I cannot see beyond," she said; and Mark felt the shudder that ran through her frame. "It will not be very long—this summer time—will it? And I am so happy now."

"And my love and care would rob you of your happiness?"

Mark said, angrily, and even bitterly. "If love makes you so miserable, Miss St. George, it is unfortunate that you must needs win so much."

"If I have to live my life without it," she whispered, very gently and earnestly, "it cannot be a happy life: but—it must be lived."

"Nora," he whispered back, his heart beating wildly as he read the truth at that moment in her brave, sad eyes, "I will wait. I will not distress you again, but you will know how I love you. Surely you have always felt the strength and fervour of my love about you. Since the hour I saw you first, waking or sleeping, my thoughts and dreams have centred in you. They have held you so steadily, and so clung and grown about you, that they could not release you now, even if you bade me wait a lifetime instead of through this one delicious summer. Ah! Nora, you shall see that men can wait sometimes as patiently as women, dear. Patiently? Who would not wait patiently for such a recompense as I may dream of now?"

"You will never change to me?" asked Nora, wistfully, "You will be my friend always?"

"Think me a friend if you wish it," Mark answered, with a warm smile in his eyes. "It is only talking of the ocean as a pond. You are a whimsical little lady, and you may feel happier to shut your eyes while you sail, and fancy that the water on whose breast you lie is shallow, and—— At last, Foster! Mrs. Pennington told me you would meet us here."

"Nora," said Celia, looking out after the door of the brongham had been closed upon them, "don't you think Mr. Poynz very handsome, in spite of his gray hair and the lines in his face?"

"He is either very handsome or—something better," returned Nora, loyally.

There was a futile attempt at general conversation then, but neither the substantial food of dress and dancing, nor the spicy seasoning of cynical criticism, could tempt successfully; and so, seeing with relief that Mrs. Pennington had delivered herself over to slumber, the girls sat silent in their corners, glad of the leisure for their thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Yet it is pleasant, I own it, . . .
Whatever else it may be, to abide in the feminine presence.

CLOUGH.

AUGUST was wearing to its close. The trees in the parks had trimmed their summer green with dainty touches of red and gold, and yet were unnoticed in their beauty, as they stood and thought perhaps of the shadow forests far away. or of the moun-

tain groves, and valleys rich in harvest, to which the fickle men and women who had been their constant companions through the summer-time, had flown for rest and pleasure now. Languid peers, who had dined in weariness and danced as martyrs, were ploughing the Scotch moors now, knee-deep in heather, their guns carried as feather weight, their laughter fresh and loud, their appetites almost insatiable. Solemn statesmen, sauntering in their home preserves, were graduating into keen and zealous sportsmen, ready for a coming struggle with the partridges, while those party struggles past seemed utterly forgotten. And London belles, in shadowy parks and gardens far from town, were budding fresh roses for another season.

So London was empty, people said.

"If we were at all fashionable people," remarked Nora St. George, as she and Mrs. Pennington and Celia sat alone among the roses, in that hour of the afternoon which had so rarely been left to them undisturbed, "we should not be here, I suppose. Yet how beautiful it is!"

Beautiful indeed, and Nora's delight in her pretty home was as fresh and as real as ever. This had been to her truly a holiday summer, and day by day the blessings it had brought her grew more precious. For full of enjoyment as it was, her life was neither listless nor frivolous, and, though she laughed and said she could not study through her holiday summer, she was unconsciously making the best of her very merriest hours, and—imperceptibly even to herself—studying day by day. And now the summer was nearly over, and the pretty house beside the Thames was to be given up in one week more.

"I think," said Celia, on that Friday afternoon, while they sat among the drooping roses, with the softly stirring branches of the elms between them and the August sun, "that we shall have none but delightful days to recollect when we look back upon this summer."

"Not one unhappy one," asserted Nora, so readily and earnestly that afterwards, when, as Celia had said, they looked back upon that summer, they recalled the words and tone and glance with a light upon them which made the after-gloom a little less dense and heavy.

"I quite thought, Nora," observed Mrs. Pennington, with one of her meek little sighs, "that before we left London you would have become engaged. Don't you like the thought of being married and settled down?"

"Tremendously," said Nora, with her grave lips and laughing eyes; "but no one has offered me a settlement."

"You do not let them, dear. Certainly you cannot prevent people—gentlemen I mean—showing how much they admire you, but it seems to me that you skilfully prevent any one asking you to be his wife. So I fancied, my dear, that you shrank from the thought of an engagement."

"No ; that is Celia's weakness," Nora answered, with a laughing glance at Miss Pennington, who sat industriously manufacturing lace, in a large and easy garden chair.

But when Celia's cheeks grew hot and red above her work, Nora turned the conversation swiftly, and made Mrs. Pennington's grave and almost pained face break into a smile. For her daughter's refusal of her first offer of marriage was not quite an inexplicable problem to Mrs. Pennington, though it was still one which she avoided touching even in her thoughts just yet, and would avoid until she had had her husband's help to make it clear. That Celia should have rejected an amiable, promising young barrister, who had a handsome face and a comfortable property, and was in fact eligible in every way, was a matter of the greatest astonishment to the Vicar's unexact little wife. But the simple, inherent wisdom of motherhood within her brought her own child's conduct within a light which could never touch Nora's, and made all seem right to her, even where it was not clear. To Nora, however, who never spoke of it except in a light and passing fashion, every feeling and motive of Celia's was clear as noonday ; and, below the merriment, there lived always the steadfast and earnest desire to bring to Celia the love of the young curate who for years had, unacknowledged to herself, held the first place in the girl's heart.

So, when Celia had refused the alliance which had been offered her that summer, Nora had, in her pretty, sisterly way, told Willoughby Foster of this, the first time they were alone ; and wondered over it with him ; and in a sedate and elderly manner expressed much regret, because Celia would be such a dear little wife, and be charming and pretty at the head of a house, and make any man's home so happy and pleasant, as well as so well-ordered. To every word of this Will agreed readily and heartily ; but, to Nora's great distress, was blind and deaf to the pleasant suggestion lurking in her eulogy, or to the dainty hint that other men could discriminate wisely, and would not waste their opportunities.

In another week Will and his old friends would be parted again for a time, for Mr. Pennington was coming to fetch his wife, who was needed at home now, and they were all to stay there until some plan was arranged for the autumn. It was a very evident fact that the Vicar's wife had in her way as thoroughly enjoyed this London season as the two girls had, but now her younger children needed her, because the aunt who was at the Vicarage taking her place was about to be married. So on the next Friday morning they were going to Kilver, to rest awhile in the quiet Vicarage, before they travelled farther into the world which was still so wonderful and new to Nora.

She had had many invitations for the autumn months, but every one had been gently and gratefully declined. for the

seasons to come seemed wrapped in uncertainty for her. Should they go abroad, or to one of the English watering-places? That question had been asked among them many times, but never answered with decision yet. Mrs. Foster had graciously offered to take Nora to Brighton later on, holding out the inducement that Willoughby would be able to spend a good deal of time with them there, and would ensure amusement for her; but Nora was not tempted by this consideration. Willoughby himself proposed their making a party and showing Nora the Rhine and the Alps, and a few more of those novelties at which a passing glance is necessary for the formation of a finished human being. But, while she hesitated—there was a strange, involuntary hesitation now as to every question of her future—Mr. Poyntz put in his quiet request that she would not go abroad just yet. With eyes growing brilliant in their struggle between timidity and daring, she asked him why; but, when she saw in his face the longing he afterwards confessed to her, she set the proposal lightly and quietly aside, and at last young Foster left off urging it.

Perhaps that time for which Mark pleaded would never come, perhaps it might never be that they two would wander together unhurried through those beautiful and wonderful scenes that she longed to see—they two, making the world beautiful for each other, while life most perfect and complete lay before them. But even if not, he must know *now* that she too had pictured the time he spoke of, and, though she had quietly passed it by, unable to consent, that she had tacitly decided that no one else should tempt her to those places of which he had told her so much, and where his strength and wisdom and experience would guide her, while his great love would be the crowning blessing of her life.

Will's project was given up eventually with good humour equal to that with which it had been started, and all his energy was immediately employed to win Mrs. Pennington's consent to go down with the girls to Heaton, and spend with him their last Sunday in England. Mrs. Pennington, who for so long had been as a mother to him, consented readily; but Nora had planned that on the Saturday morning, just before they were to start, Mrs. Brunton should send for her. Mrs. Brunton had often before done this in vain; but now the urgent little note entreating Nora to come to her for two or three days was to be answered in person. Nora would wait to see them off, greatly enjoying Celia's excitement, and very incredulous through their prognostications of Will's regrets; then she herself would drive away, not at all ashamed of having had a voice herself in this arrangement, and building all sorts of wild romances for Will and Celia.

Never once had she been to Heaton since that spring day when Mark had driven them. yet she could not fully have ex-

plained, even to herself, why she shrank from going. Mrs. Pennington and Celia were right when they fancied that Miss Foster's inuendoes influenced her; Will himself was right when he fancied that she was only capricious in delaying her visit from week to week; and she herself was right too when she fancied that, because she saw Will so often, a journey to Heaton was unnecessary; but a vague, uncomprehended superstitious feeling lay behind, and held her most firmly of all. To speed Celia on her way to the young curate's pretty country home, she would be prompt and untiring; and to charm her with it beforehand no words were spared; but it was Celia for whom this second day at Heaton was to be made glad and happy. She had had hers.

They had been talking about it that afternoon, as they sat in the shadowy garden, and it was only in fun that Nora contradicted and threw down all Celia's shy but vivid anticipations of Willoughby's sermons, and home, and hospitality, and merits generally; for she was delighted to feel that Celia would never lose one glowing tint upon all these pleasant expectations.

"I suppose we shall see Willoughby this afternoon," observed Mrs. Pennington, glancing towards the terrace, for the sound of the visitors' bell had faintly reached them. "How surprised he seems that his mother and sisters postpone their departure from day to day! They are to pay two or three visits before they go to Brighton, and they say a great deal about London being unendurable now; and yet something continually turns up to detain them here against their will."

"I can hardly fancy Genevieve kept here against her will," said Celia, with a laugh, "as long as Mr. Poynz finds town endurable. "And I think Dr. Armstrong's visits make it bearable to Victoria too. Poor Mrs. Foster! Look! there comes Willoughby!"

"You see you cannot get rid of me, Mrs. Pennington," he said, as he shook hands with them. "I try to keep away now and then, but it's awfully hard; everything is so pleasant here, and we must make these last days merry ones, you know. I'm come very luckily now though, for Graham is at the door on his drag. He says you promised that some day he should drive you, instead of Poynz, and he was so afraid of coming in second, that he engaged Poynz days ago to come as his guest only—as his passenger, Poynz puts it. You will come, won't you?" added Will, his excitement growing. "We shall have a capital day. They propose the Alexandra Palace, because, though you have driven there four-in-hand, you've not properly seen either the palace or the grounds. Nora, you will come, won't you?"

Mark had reached them by this time with Captain Graham, and the united persuasions soon won Mrs. Pennington's consent to the little expedition

"Let us make haste off," urged Will, "for fear of anyone coming to hinder us. We don't want even Armstrong to-day, do we, Nora?"

She only shook her head merrily as they walked to the house. Will's opinion of Dr. Armstrong was just the open-hearted, unsuspicious opinion of old days, and she made no attempt to change it.

There was such a merry quiet talk behind the fleet gray horses, that the drive could not have been wearisome even if it had been *all* through dusty, busy roads, as part of it was. And when at last they ascended the hill, they had forgotten the hot streets in the enjoyment of the wide scene before them, and, without a thought for the ugliness of the building before which Captain Graham drew up his grays, they could stand and enjoy the fairness of the view, and feel that they had met a fresh, pure, hillside breeze at last.

The concert was half over when they entered the hall, and Captain Graham, who kept at Nora's side, had many cynical and witty things to say of the performers; but Nora turned his cynicism gaily back upon himself, and plucked as usual from every pleasure offered her a tiny bouquet of enjoyment for herself. Not that she wore it always in the eyes of men and women, but she held it as her own for the time, and then put it tenderly away in very love for it, without knowing that its sweetness would make the after-time the sweeter.

"You have not thought it a bore at all, Miss St. George, that is quite evident," her companion whispered, when the concert was over; "and yet how silent you have chosen to be most of the time! Were you very deep in thoughts which I might not share?"

"Very deep. I was wondering whether I could teach myself the violoncello if I tried. How beautiful it was in that symphony!"

"The 'cello beautiful?" laughed Will Foster, as the scattered party drifted together again beyond the crowd. "Why, Nora, what will you try next?"

"Your patience, Mr. Foster, I'm afraid, for I want to see everything to-day."

"But there is nothing to see," observed Captain Graham, with the evident intention of not relinquishing his place beside her. "You cannot wander delighted here, as you have been used to do at Sydenham, Miss St. George. But we will indeed try to make the visit agreeable to you. At what hour shall we dine?"

Nora smiled. The visit was so sure to be agreeable to her, without any effort of his; and it mattered nothing to her at what hour they should dine—so little she guessed when the last figure would be put to one of the great dates of her life!

She had walked a long time at Captain Graham's side, conti-

cising, admiring, laughing, and merrily ignoring his compliments, when at last the whole party met again, and sat together, while the band played as a background to their idle words, or varied thoughts. Then for a long time they seemed all together, breaking easily into twos and threes, differently every few minutes, but almost imperceptibly, as they hovered in the same spots, and were arrested by the same sounds and objects. But it was Mark who was always readiest to give Mrs. Pennington his arm, and it was at Celia's side that Nora lingered when she was allowed to do so.

"Celia," she whispered once, her eyes filled with laughter, "when you talk to Captain Graham you try so hard not to seem very much interested in anything, but it is quite a failure. No two children in a hayfield were ever more ignorantly and altogether foolishly happy than you and I are to-day."

"What about the people's enjoyment, Miss St. George? Is it evident to you here to-day?"

Mr. Poynz had come to her side at last, and she turned promptly to answer.

"They, most of them, look happy; but I was just telling Celia that no one here, Mr. Poynz, can be so intensely happy as I am myself. I—I don't really think any girl in the world can be more so."

He had skilfully and imperceptibly detained her for those few seconds; then they two were sauntering very slowly on.

"Why are you so happy?" he asked, just as coolly and quizzically as if he had not yet learned to understand her.

"Why!" she echoed, with a puzzled glance into his face. "I never thought why."

"Try to think, and then tell me, that I may be happier still."

"Of course," she said then, with the easiest, yet most gentle nonchalance, as she wished that the looped-up brim of her white Rubens hat could fall and shade the cheek next to him, "it is because I have so much money."

"I see. I'm rather happy, too."

"Yet you," she answered, in deep meditation, "never found a fortune unexpectedly, as I did—did you?"

"Indeed I did. A fortune beside which your wealth seems like nothing."

"So big?" she questioned, lifting her dainty eyebrows.

"Beyond all measurement," he said; and then was silent for a time, because Nora seemed so interested in every thing and every one about her.

"Tread warily among the long silk trains, Mr. Poynz, we don't like our flounces trodden on. Do you notice," she added presently, "the difference between those who come to see, and those who come to be seen. Isn't it a pity when there is that difference between two who come together? They must spoil each other's pleasure."

"Perhaps not. I don't seem to be spoiling yours; yet my sole aim just now is to be admired."

She laughed irresistibly at the thought, but her eyes were grave again in a moment.

"Mr. Poynz, sometimes I try to fancy what you would seem to me if you were a stranger; but I never can. You didn't seem quite a stranger to me even on that day I saw you first, when you drove me home from Kilver."

"If I fancied you ever could think of me as a stranger, Nora," he said, in that great earnestness of his which was always so quiet, "I should wish that day had never dawned; though I know it now to have been the happiest of my life."

"Captain Graham wondered just now," she went on presently as they strolled out into the grounds, "how I could take any interest in so many groups of common-place people whom we met—some so shabby, and some so gay. I told him it was because I had once been poor myself. I don't want to forget it, Mr. Poynz, and I never want to be really fashionable, if that would oblige me to forget my interest in those who are—what I so lately was."

"If you are ever called to fill even a higher position, Miss St. George," Mark said, "you will fill it the better and more worthily for that sympathy, which touches not only the very poor—whom so many will help—but those from whom many who could help, so often shrink, because the barrier between is not marked enough."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Thou hast no skill, my maiden,
To take such knowledge; sweet is all thy lore,
And all this bitter.

ERECTHEUS.

"MR. POYNZ," said Nora, presently, with a little cry of joy, as she stood above the lake, "I have found her at last. I have found Miss Archer. "Do you see her there, sitting by the lake? Would you—would you mind going back alone, please? I *must* speak to Helen."

He comprehended her wish to go alone, but made her promise not to return without him. Then he stood and watched her to the spot, noticing how others watched her too; but he turned away hurriedly when he saw her greeting to Helen. Yet these two friends, when the girl's glad and tender greeting was over, fell into a strange, pathetic silence, while each looked into the other's eyes—but with such a widely different gaze!

"Helen," whispered Nora, presently, below her breath, "have you been ill?"

Then Helen raised her hand and covered her eyes for a moment, before she spoke.

"No, not ill. How good it is to see you again, Nora! And you look so happy, and—so beautiful. I have heard much of your beauty and your charm, dear; but you are just what you were in the old days, except that you are more—but perhaps the dress makes the difference."

"And where have you been since the old days, Helen?" Nora asked, trying not to look pitifully into Miss Archer's face. "I know you did not receive my letter; but—did you quite forget me, or wish to lose sight of me?"

"I wrote once to Miss Foster, asking if I might hear of you," she said, while a faint unsteady flush disturbed the pallor of her face, "but I never quite expected an answer. I had gone into Berkshire then—they knew where—and I have been there ever since."

"And have you been unhappy?" questioned Nora, very sadly, as she turned her eyes again from the flushed cheeks and tired eyes.

"Oh, no, quite happy. They were all most kind to me—most kind. I am only leaving them now because my pupil is going to finish her education in Germany. There she is, Nora, in the boat with all those children and her father. I sat here because her little friends wished to go with her. They will come for me presently, and then we shall drive home again. We shall stay in town till they leave England. No, I have been very fortunate," she went on, in her patient, grateful tones, broken now and then by a short, dry cough, which struck Nora like a blow. "Don't look so moved, dear. If I seem changed to you, it is only want of rest, and that only through my own fault—my own ignorance, I mean. My pupil is a very quick and clever girl, Nora, and, as you see, nearly grown up, so that I have had to work hard to keep in advance of her. Do you understand? It was all night-work, of course—to be done after she had left me—and it tells upon me now perhaps more than it would have done when I was a girl."

"You are a girl now," said Nora, tenderly, "and you will soon be strong, Helen—so strong! And you shall not have a care in the world if I can prevent it, or anything to do except enjoy yourself; and all your time shall be leisure; and we will go wherever it is most healthy, and travel easily. And you shall have sea air, and *such* care and love, Helen. I've looked and waited so long for you. Say you will come with me now."

"No; that cannot be," said Helen, quite firmly, though the tears had gathered in her eyes while Nora spoke. "On Monday, when I leave this pupil, I have another to go to, whom they kindly found for me. She is a little girl—an only child—so the teaching will be easy and light and as I am to go to her

daily, I have engaged two little rooms for myself within a walk; two rather bare little rooms, because my salary will be less, and——”

“How soon may I go to this lady, Helen, and beg her to excuse you?”

“Oh no, that must not be,” Miss Archer answered, hurriedly; “I must go.”

“Then you shall go just for the month,” said Nora, with regret, “and you will leave them then and come to me. I shall fetch you when I come back from Ireland. Where are the rooms you have taken, Helen?”

“I will give you the address,” said Helen, writing it as she spoke. “You—you will not give it to any one else, dear?”

“Not to any one,” said Nora, making the promise readily, and resolving silently that these two rooms should be made comfortable before Helen went to occupy them, and that various luxuries should be stored there the next day.

“They are both on the ground floor,” smiled Helen, “because my breath is not very good for running up and downstairs; so if you ever come to see me——”

“If I ever come to see you!” cried Nora, with a great compassion in her beautiful eyes. “You will have me there so soon. I just think! Long as we have known each other, it will be the first visit I have ever paid you. And you must have everything you want, Helen. What is the use of my money to me unless I may use it as I have so long wished to do? Wasn’t it funny about a fortune coming to me, Helen?” she added, trying to speak lightly.

“Very strange. Do you remember the romances you used to weave about being rich—on the money you were to earn as a governess. Do you enjoy it in reality as much as you fancied you should, while it seemed utterly out of your reach?”

“More,” said the girl, earnestly. “I have never ceased wishing for you, but that was the only drawback to my pleasure, Helen. And now,” she added, with a loving pressure of the hand, “I have you.”

“Who is with you here, Nora?” inquired Miss Archer, after a little silence, during which she had found it hard to realise, even yet, the fact of Nora’s tender, loving attachment to her.

“Mrs. Pennington, and Celia——”

“The little friend you left behind in Ireland, and loved so well, and from whom you were always expecting long letters?”

“You haven’t forgotten, then?” exclaimed Nora delightedly. “And Mr. Foster is here.”

“I thought so,” smiled Helen. “You are to marry him very soon—his sister says. My pupil’s sister told me this. She told me many things of them and of you, when she came home after this season. And how did you evade Mr. Foster to come to me, dear?”

"He was not with me. We came on Captain Graham's drag, and Mr. Poynz was with me when I saw you, and he will come for me again. Helen—oh, my dear, I wish I could give you a little of my health."

"It is nothing," said Helen, losing the sudden pallor which had startled Nora. "I—I cannot expect"—with a faint smile—"to look healthy all my life, dear. There! I am summoned, you see. Good-bye. It has been a great, great pleasure to me to see you; and, if we don't meet again, this hour will be one of my pleasant memories. Will you tell Mr. Poynz how vividly I remember all his kindness? And—but I must go. Good-bye, dear little friend."

Her eyes were quite dry, though a little feverish, when, with the gentle kiss of her pupil on her lips, she turned away, and felt that all the world was better, and brighter, and more faithful, for that hour she had spent resting by the lake. And Nora stood for a few minutes looking after her and thinking, while Mark came slowly up. She repeated to him, as they went back to the Palace, much that Helen had told her, and her own plans to make Miss Archer happier for that month, and then to win her to stay with her; but, remembering her promise, she would not tell him where Helen's home was to be. But when they joined the others Helen's name was not mentioned, for there are some subjects we lay sacredly aside when mirth and gaiety are around us.

"I hope you are immensely hungry, Nora," whispered Will, as he seated himself beside her in the dining-hall. "You are to enjoy everything to-day, you know, and dinner is a special item."

They jested all through the meal, in a quiet, grave way which took from none of the fun; and then they spoke lazily of leaving in another hour's time, and strolled out to hear the band in the central hall. They had all walked on to look for seats, except Mr. Poynz and Nora, when, as they sauntered idly on the edge of the throng, Mark was met by one of his grooms.

"I came on to you with this telegram, sir," he said, breathless in his haste, "because I fancied it might be of importance. I remembered that once before you wished to go off to Florence at once, and missed the train through my delay. I've a hansom here, sir, and there's a train from Wood Green which will be in time. Richards will meet it at the Great Northern Station with your own cab, and he will have your portmanteau. We thought we had better be ready for the Dover mail from Charing Cross. Of course, if it isn't necessary, sir, no harm is done."

The man moved away when he had said this, but Mark had paused with the telegram unopened, and was looking sadly into Nora's face.

"I may have to leave you at once, Nora," he said, speaking low and earnestly. "And—I had never thought of this."

She smiled a little, not quite understanding it all. A crowd of people were passing to and fro; a crowd of instruments were rushing through the overture to *Zampa*; she was standing still, waiting to understand; while Mark was looking at her, with a great sorrow in his eyes, and—something more. And just above his head was the passionate struggle of the Laocoon.

"Hope will soon bring me back when I have the power to come, Nora," he said. "You understand me, don't you? I cannot go, letting you misunderstand me. You know what you are to me, my own beloved?"

"Yes—I know."

Her eyes were not on his face now—she could not trust them there—so she was looking at the huge, lifeless struggling figures; and then her eyes were lifted higher, and she smiled a little, for over this fierce struggle she read—

GOD HELPS A MERRY FELLOW.

She read it again and again, while the band flew on through *Zampa*, and merry laughter reached her; and she knew that Mark had waited and spoken to her again before he opened the envelope he held, and that she had nodded with another smile—it was not hard to smile, it was only hard to see Mark's face as it had looked to her a few minutes before.

"Yes, I must go," he said, putting her hand within his arm. "What would I give now for these last hours to come again? What a day I would have made this, if I had known it was to be broken by such a separation? Nora, my love, let this parting be our last."

They were walking on now, very slowly; among the gay moving figures on a level with them, and the gaily-coloured lifeless ones above the crowd; and the band was playing softly.

"Although I have to go," Mark said, pausing a moment, and gently touching the fingers on his arm, "nothing can ever really part us, my beloved, and I shall be with you again so soon."

Her eyes still avoided his face, and so again she raised her head, and idly read the other painted words beneath which he had chanced to pause. As she read the motto, she started a little at his side, and then repeated it in her heart, trying to smile, and tell herself that it was silly—

TO-MORROW A NEW SCENE OF THINGS MAY OPEN.

"I have deeply loved you, Nora," Mark went on, leading her towards the door, "ever since I saw you first; and now I wish I had told you long ago of this. How can you ever realise what my love for you has been?"

"Oh, if she could but tell him! If he could but know that the one chief blessing of her life had been the consciousness of his love, and that her heart had been given to him long ago!

"Are you obliged to go?" she asked, wondering where were the words she wanted

"Yes, it is a summons to a sick-bed."

TO-MORROW A NEW SCENE OF THINGS MAY OPEN.

The words were clearer than *his* words, though scarcely comprehended yet.

"I shall miss you very much," she said. And then she stopped; for a little girl who had been running before them tripped and fell, and Nora gently raised her to her feet, and kissed her; while the child looked wonderingly into the white, sad face.

"My thoughts will be with you ever, Nora. Let us say *good-by* alone, here, my darling. Then I must take you to them."

"Good-by," said Nora, leaving her hand in his. "I—I shall miss you so very, very much. This has been a pleasant day, hasn't it? I am glad we came. Perhaps to-morrow will not be very different from to-day. Perhaps a new—scene of things may not—open. You will be back soon, you say. How the music changes, doesn't it? I forgot that this overture was so sad now and then. What is this large white woman, offering us the gold wreath—*Victory*, is it? I don't like it—do you?"

"Good-by," he said again, wondering at her tone as he unwillingly released her hand. "Good-by, my best beloved."

When they had rejoined their party, they found, to their great surprise, that Nuel Armstrong was with them; but there was no time for any explanation from him. Mark hurriedly told of his telegram and the arrangements his servant had made, and then prepared for his own departure. He kept Nora at his side now, openly and resolutely. He seemed to see no one else. It might have been that the Palace held no one to his knowledge but the girl who walked by his side, trying so hard to maintain her old gay and debonair spirit. And, though the others looked so regretfully at Mark, Nuel Armstrong seemed to watch only *her*.

"Oh! Nora," Mark whispered, as they went down the terrace steps, "if it could but all melt away, and leave us two alone! I long to say what is in my heart to-night, and cannot—here."

"If you intend to catch the mail at Charing Cross, I advise you not to miss any train from here," observed Dr. Armstrong.

"Graham will see you all safely home," said Mark. And then he had driven off; his gaze to the last riveted on Nora's face.

"Whenever you like to go home, Miss St. George," said Captain Graham, wondering at the rapt expression in her face, as she stood listening to the distant bells—the beautiful slight figure drawn to its full height,—“tell me and we will start.”

"You will like to go now, Nora," Will Foster said; and she started at the changed tone. "I see that you will, dear," he added, trying to speak more easily; for his eyes had been suddenly opened now, as they had never been while everyone had gently tried to open them for him.

"Not until Celia wishes it—unless Mrs. Pennington does," began Nora: but Nuel Armstrong's clear, raised tones interrupted her.

"Excuse me, Foster, but I have something to say to my cousin."

"Please say it here," entreated Nora, shrinking from him, as Will courteously moved away.

"You would soon be sorry if I did—and angry too," rejoined Nuel, offering her his arm. "It is not for the world to hear, Nora."

Without taking his arm, she walked with him, until he stopped in a quiet corner of an outer gallery, from which the world looked very still and wide and calm that August evening, while the church bells rang softly still, far away as it seemed. But, though Nuel had been so hurried, he paused now in a silence as deep as was hers in her great calm; and it was only when at last she turned and looked at him in her surprise that he broke it, speaking in a voice as concentrated as had been his gaze at her through Mark's farewell.

"I saw the arrogance of Mr. Poynz when he set out, Nora, and I fancied, perhaps, he entertained absurd ideas of—of paying attention to you with success. His arrogance will be short-lived enough, though, and I have come to prove that. You know what was to be your love-test, Nora. Well, I have done my part, and stood the test. I have succeeded, darling—as men only succeed when they put their heart into their work,—and I am come to claim my reward. Of course—of course," he added, emphatically, in Nora's silence, "it was not to be expected that I should love you for years wholly and entirely as I have done, and win no return. Now I have come for my recompense; your own voluntary payment, dear; no forced consent, just because you will feel yourself—utterly in my power."

He had put his hand into his pocket as he said these last words very pointedly, but she stood quite still, leaning a little on the rails, as she still seemed to listen more to the bells than to his words.

"I have spared no trouble to serve you, Nora, and I bring you to-night my claim to your love; the solution of all your old doubts, and the offer of a happy life, irrespective of any sin which has shadowed your past. I have been away from you in my search for this, but I need never be away from you again. I did not mean to tell you to-night; I only followed you here for my own pleasure. But, when I saw what a fool's dream that man was encouraging when he went away, I knew it was time to speak."

The bells sounded louder now, as Nora looked wearily across the wide, calm scene. Was she drifting from Mark's love and care so fast—so very fast? Did he guess how she longed for him—how soon she had missed him—how suddenly she must learn to act alone? Could he feel her suffering as he went on—so fast, and so far from her—farther with every one of these aching, miserable minutes?

"For your sake, Nora, I have followed your father's history—I never turned from the utterance of his name, as these holiday friends of yours would have done. I loved you too well to feel you were hurt by his guilt, and now I bring you—this letter."

Her whole face had changed, and her eyes were wide and feverish as she took the letter into her trembling fingers.

"It will speak for itself," Nuel said; "and after you have read it you will tell me your decision. I have no fear. After reading that, you will see there is but one way for you to act. You will see then, Nora, what has been done for you, and who has loved you best. And you will acknowledge that I have given you the surest test of love."

Still she could not answer him, as she stood looking longingly over the wide, unknown space which lay between herself and Mark. And then there came to her a strange and horrible fancy that she stood—as she had done once before—between him and the death that was prepared for him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The trial test
Appointed to all flesh at some one stage
Of soul's achievement.

The Inn Album.

"You could scarcely decipher your father's letter now, Nora, Take it home, and I will see you again after you have read it."

Dr. Armstrong's reason for saying this was threefold. He saw how unsteady was the hand which held the paper; he fancied that the words would be unintelligible to the bewildered eyes which looked so sadly out across the wide expanse; and he rightly guessed that Nora might at any moment be summoned away from him. So he even repeated his advice, as if it were a promise of respite.

"Take it home with you, darling, and I will see you to-morrow; you will have understood by that time all that your father says."

"My father!"

"Your father, Nora. Are you not glad to feel that he is found at last."

"He has been dead all my life," said the girl, speaking wearily in her great bewilderment. "Yet you say this letter is from him. I cannot understand."

"Do not try, dear," he advised, hastily—even with eagerness. "Wait until you are alone and at rest. It will all be clear to you then, and you will see plainly what your own decision ought to be."

"Then is my father living?" she asked, turning her eyes to

meet his for the first time. "Have I had a father all my life, and never known or seen him."

"Living indeed, dear," Noel Armstrong answered, with an inexplicable stiffness and hesitation in his suave tones; "but of course you could not know until I was able to tell you. Who else would have laboured to learn the truth for you, as I have done? Whom else could you expect to devote time, and energy, and—and money, dear, to please you and make you happy, as I have done? No, the truth has been hidden from you, Nora, all your life, but I have found it at last. And surely you are glad to owe your happiness to one who has always been your friend and protector. I have for some time fancied your father was not really dead," he went on, in her silence; "and that the falsehood had only been told to silence all inquiries; and so, as I knew you longed to know something of your parents—even your lightest wish has always been studied by me, Nora, and this was no light wish—I resolved to face all difficulties, and learn the truth for you. I have spared myself no labour, been baffled by no repulse, and so at last am able to come to you and tell you I have conquered all difficulties, and can bring you and your father together. It is for this purpose, Nora," he continued, after a pause, gently and plausibly uttering the lie, "that I have been so constantly in England lately—in London especially, where I felt sure I should at last be successful in my search."

"Why did you tell me to-night, and *here*?" asked Nora, without turning, while the fingers of both hands closed on the letter she held.

"I explained that a few minutes ago," he answered, his dry lips moving slowly. "I came here simply because, when I reached your house this afternoon, they told me you were here, and, as I had nothing else to do this evening, I thought I would come and join your party for an hour, as you were going away from town so soon. I intended to give you this letter when we separated to-night, and to leave it you to read, as I am doing now; but, when I saw Mr. Poynz appropriating your attention to himself in his confident, arrogant way, I knew it was time to speak."

"Why?"

"You will soon understand why," Noel replied, almost gaily, in his strenuous efforts to maintain his usual tones. "Your own sense of honour is so keen, Nora, that I shall never have cause to explain what you yourself will see so clearly. An Englishman of high birth would never voluntarily court, or desire to marry, any girl—even though pretty enough to suit his exacting and capricious fancy—under a name which is not hers, and to which she can lay no shadow of claim. And so, when I saw Poynz trying to make you believe he seriously cares for you, I

knew it was time to speak. You could not marry him legally, and I am come in time to save you from years of misery and degradation. You understand me, Nora?" he questioned, his dry lips halting a little over the words, which every moment grew in vehemence. "Poynz would not for a moment dream of marrying you, if he knew your real name; so I have come to spare you. If he won your promise, and then discovered the fraud that had been practised upon him, he would repudiate you with scorn and ignominy—perhaps then, poor child, to break your heart. And, if, worse than all, the secret was safe until after your marriage, and *then* reached his ears, as it would be sure to do, he would turn adrift, without scruple, the wife who was no wife."

"We have no need to talk of this," said Nora, with a sudden brilliancy in her misty eyes.

"But who," concluded Nuel, as if he had not heard, though a new light burned just now in his own eyes too, "had gained a husband by a name which had been given her to screen her inheritance of a criminal's."

"A—what?" whispered Nora, below her breath.

"A criminal's," he repeated, his smooth tones even slower than usual. "A murderer's, in fact, Nora. Hush, my darling!" he whispered, starting forward, as a swift cry passed her white lips. "Do not take it so terribly to heart. I will help you to hide his sin, and we will make life for him less miserable and bitter than it has been during these past years, when he has vainly longed to see his daughter, and to beg her forgiveness."

Nuel's skilful reading of the girl's nature had guided him in that last hint and implied reproach; but a new page had been turned to-night which he could not yet decipher, and so, though her heart in all its shame and pain and surprise was resolute to seek and help her father, she answered, quite simply,

"When Mr. Poynz returns, I will tell him about—my name."

"Very well," said Nuel, hissing the words between his teeth, in his suppressed wrath and fear and jealousy. "It is only what any other love-sick girl would do. Your father's life signifies little, of course—*nothing* in comparison with your lover's passing pleasure. I might have guessed it, Nora," he added, again skilfully drawing upon his knowledge of her; "your father is a stranger to you, and I dare say it is impossible for you to feel his danger, and sympathise with it, simply because he *is* your father. It is hardly to be expected indeed. Not even as I feel can I expect you to do, for I have in a measure shared his danger lately, and it is but natural that I should have suffered myself until I could be assured that he was in absolute security. It would be unfair for me to look for this compassion or anxiety in you, Nora dear; and so I do not blame you for not showing it. Tell Mr. Poynz, by all means, if you wish to do so. Your poor broken-hearted father will never know you have betrayed him to

the very man who still cruelly seeks him—the very man,” repeated Nuel, startled just a little by Nora’s expression, but eagerly following up his advantage, “who has thought it no injustice to pursue him from place to place, and make his life that of a shunned and hunted wanderer. Tell him, by all means. He is not quite a stranger to you, as I and your father are, and he has evidently a fancy for a beautiful wife, as long as he does not suspect her to be the child of the man his vengeance and the vengeance of his family are pursuing so relentlessly. You may safely tell, for your father will not know. I would not of course betray to him his daughter’s treachery, and surely he would never *guess* this last cruel blow could be dealt him in his abandonment. Try it, Nora. Throw yourself on your lover’s mercy—great powers, *his* mercy, whose malevolence keeps your father friendless and forsaken!”

“Dr. Armstrong,” said Nora, facing him once more—and it seemed to Nuel as if her very beauty had undergone a change, as well as her voice and her manner of addressing him—“how am I then to discover whether what you have told me—is true?”

“True!” he echoed, hiding with a laugh his mortification at her proud and cold utterance of his name as that of a stranger. “Every one knows it is true, though no one has ever cared for you enough to undertake its proof. Rachel Corr knows it; even Shan in his convict prison knows it, for he heard his step-mother relate the whole story. Write to them if you like, but it will only be putting enemies upon the track of your father, whom all along I have tried so hard to shield and spare; and to whom I long to take you, that he may have one gleam of happiness in his isolated career. You shall not be asked to promise to-night, my darling. When you have read that letter, you will understand all I cannot tell you. It contains—for I was with him when he wrote it—one or two conditions to which you will consent before you see him. Then, when you have promised to comply with these, I will take you to him. Shall I not then have fulfilled the test which you yourself allowed would be the truest test of a man’s love for you?”

“I shall read this letter to-night,” said Nora, coldly. “When shall I see you?”

“I heard you were going to Heaton to-morrow; but I believe you will change your plans when——”

“It does not signify at all what you heard,” interposed Nora, “speak as if I had formed no plans at all.”

“Then I shall see you to-morrow as early as I may. And will you be ready to come?”

“To my father? Yes, I shall be ready.”

“Then at what time will the others be gone, that I may speak to you alone, my darling?”

“The train—the train Mr. Foster’s guests go by leaves Waterloo at two. I think. After that I will be at home.”

"Oh ! Nora," he cried, his passion bursting at last through the restraint he had long held over himself, "do not look so desolate, my darling, and so proud. I could scarcely recognize you as my brilliant, wilful pet of the old days. But it will all come back," he added, with an attempt at ease and assurance ; "the gaiety and light-heartedness of your girlhood. I will give it back to you, my love, in the future, which my care shall make so free from care for you, and my love shall make so full of joy."

"Nora," he persisted, as she stood once more gazing far away over the quiet landscape, while the distant bells chimed on with a softened beauty even in their monotony, "no thought or memory of your father's crime could ever weigh with me against my faithful and devoted love, which is so great that it even extends to *him* in pity. And, as my wife, my darling, your name will be an honoured and an acknowledged one."

"As your wife," she said, with a faint cold smile upon her lips. "I would rather die."

In the minute's utter silence which followed her words, when, neither saw the other's face, Will Foster came up to them, moving slowly and quietly, for him ; and with a nameless heaviness on his usually cheerful face. And yet never in her life had Nora met him so gladly, nor with such a sense of comfort and security put her hand within his arm.

Once or twice during the homeward drive in the quiet twilight, some one spoke laughingly of the dearth of conversation ; and Celia often turned to Nora in genuine surprise, remembering how gay had been their drive along the same road five hours before, and how much Nora had done towards making it so. But the change this evening was not in Nora alone ; and gradually those who had at first conscientiously tried to break the spell, gave in to it. So they went home very silently in the pleasant August gloaming.

"Nora, dear," whispered Celia, as they stood in their own garden, watching Captain Graham drive away, with Will sitting silent beside him, "have your great happiness and enjoyment tired you ? Or—or have you and—Mr. Foster—I mean, have you vexed each other, Nora ?"

"Will never vexes anyone, I think," said Nora, unconscious how closely her heart clung just then to these old friends, and without even a smile for Celia's timid way of alluding to a possible quarrel. "I could almost as easily quarrel with you as with Will ; and nothing could more clearly prove the goodness of both of you than the fact of your never having either of you quarrelled even with *me*."

"It takes two to make a quarrel," asserted Celia, the aphorism sounding quite new in her fresh young voice. "Come in now, dear ; mamma will want her tea."

There was no hurry or impatience in Nora's manner through

the rest of the evening ; on the contrary, she seemed almost to dread their separation, and delayed it again and again, on the most trivial pretences. And when, at last, she had bidden good night to both Mrs. Pennington and Celia, in their own rooms—a good night almost pathetic in its great tenderness—and had dismissed her maid, she sat for long with her face hidden in the cushions of her couch, and the letter Nuel Armstrong had given her still sealed in her hand. And, while she lay so, her beautiful hair pushed with feverish fingers from her white temples, it seemed to her as if she were drifting from this pleasant home and all who cared for her—slowly, yet surely, drifting out into a wide, dark, stormy, heaving sea.

"It must be—like death," she whispered to herself, rising wearily.

Then she drew the candles near her, and opened her letter on the little table beside her couch, putting her hands upon her temples once more, as if the touch could stay their throbbing.

Slowly and very thoughtfully, after she had read the letter once through, did she go back to the beginning, and read it again, and then a third time, even more slowly and thoughtfully ; but her fingers never relaxed in their pressure, nor did her breath lose its laboured slowness.

And this was the letter Nuel Armstrong had given her :

"My child, we have been strangers all your life, and so I cannot tell how you may receive the tidings of my existence, which Nuel will give you with this letter. And, if I hesitate a little before trusting you, you will recollect the fact of my having been kept so long a stranger to everything relating to my only child. Dearly as I long to see you, Nora, you will pardon my caution when I tell you there are men even now upon my track, who, if they can capture me, will be well paid by the man who bears the title which should be mine, and who for twenty years has been my enemy and persecutor. This man's name you may have heard, Nora, and about *him* I must win your first promise. Unless you can consent to this first demand of mine, I cannot see you ; for, though life is not dear to me for its own sake, I would never bring on you the exposure which would be inevitable after my seizure, whether you help me in this or not.

"The man I speak of is known in the world as Lord Keston ; I hear that he meditates seeking an alliance with you on his arrival in England, because he saw you once, and you pleased his fancy. Besides which he has been heard to say that your grandfather's savings will release his estate from its encumbrances. When you hear, my child, that it is through *this* man and his family, that I am here in hiding, you will understand why I bid you give me a faithful, solemn promise that you will never listen to a word of marriage—love is not in the question, or I would say too a word of love—from Lord Keston. Your next promise

must be to keep my secret. Surely my own child will never be tempted to do otherwise. Though I have never seen you, Nuel has told me of you, and I feel that I can trust you in all. He loves you dearly, and for your sake he has been good and helpful to me. If you will come to see me, he will bring you. What happiness for me to see you both—the only two in the world to whom I can ever trust the burdensome secret of my name! Your friends would spurn you if they knew of your relationship to me; so for your own sake you must not tell them. But it is for *mine* I urge your solemn pledge of secrecy. My own daughter must not be the one to lead me to death. Was your grandfather kind to you, my child? Nuel never says a word against him, but I often fear your girlhood was not so happy as I used to picture it to myself. You were his daughter's child, and in dying she sent you to him. He ought to have loved you for her sake. So all these years you see you have borne your mother's name. How could I give you mine? I cannot even sign it here, because I have not yet won your promise never to utter it to anyone. Bring me your promises in writing, and let Nuel guide you to me. How I long for you, my child, and I trust you to him! He has been my friend always, as well as yours. This I know well now. Come to me with this true friend, whom I can trust."

* * * * *

In the early dawn of the August day, Nora sat at her open window, breathing thirstily the morning air. Through the brief darkness of the summer night she had tried to re-live her past life in thought, that she might see it all in the light of this truth which she had learnt at last. But clear and continuous thought would not come at her call, while her heart ached so heavily, and her temples throbbed with such ceaseless pain.

Just once or twice, with the pure scent of the opening roses, had come a memory—as sweet and soothing as their breath—of the few words Mark had said to her before he left her the previous day! Only the previous day! But she would not hold that memory, though it would have comforted her so to lay it to her aching heart just then. She let it pass her, as the flowers' fragrance passed her—and held steadily, and without looking beyond the courage and constancy which, through the silence and solitude of this night, had unconsciously grown so firm and true and steadfast. There was no intricacy in Nora's reasoning. Her resolution stood, from the first, clear and distinct before her, and the way to reach it straight and well defined. Her father had the first claim upon her; he was nearest, and——

The thought broke off in a sigh of intense pain. "Oh! if I could feel as I used to dream that I should feel if a father's love were mine, and I could feel a father's care and kiss! Will it ever come? Will it come when I see him? Oh! how cruel to have lived these years without him, and to have grown happy while he was forsaken!"

There was no reproach in her mind that the burden which had so long been borne for her should have been put upon her now. There was only the acute pain of knowledge, and the underlying weariness of regret for something gone from her life.

And so the morning found her, white and frail, as if after a long illness, but quite steadfast in her resolve. The silvery light of the new-born day still lay upon the grass, and the birds were scarcely yet awake, when Nora crept downstairs and out into the garden.

"Because," she said to herself, looking up with dry, wide eyes, "Kitty always said the morning air gave me a colour in my cheeks, and they look so white now that they would startle Celia."

Perhaps when at last Miss Pennington, sure of finding Nora at the river side, ran down there, and summoned her to breakfast, the morning breezes *had* really given her cheeks a tint of their own colour. At any rate Celia seemed to notice no difference in the pleasant smiling glance which met her, or in the ready greeting.

"Is it not a lovely morning?" she asked, enthusiastically, as the girls strolled up to the house, arm in arm. "And aren't you glad? Will said it was sure to be fine for us at Heaton, didn't he?"

"Yes; I expect it is always fine at Heaton."

"But really, Nora, I wish you would be grave for once, and tell me more about Will's parish, that I may astonish him by recognising it in a moment. What is it like *exactly*?"

"The garden of Eden."

"Oh! nonsense. How you enjoy teasing me! Recall your first day there."

"No—no, please," begged Nora, hastily.

"Why not?" inquired Celia, even her simple credulous nature awaking to surprise at Nora's tone.

"Because," said Nora, speaking lightly again by an effort, "it was the first completely happy day I ever had, and to-day—I mean I daresay I exaggerate everything when I recall it. Wait until you have been there yourself, Celia."

"Does Will know how charmed you were with his home?"

Nora laughed merrily when she saw in what manner Celia had interpreted her words.

"Will knows," she said, with her cool little nod; "but the knowledge of the fact did not charm him, Celia, as it ought to have done. In fact, I don't believe he cared at all; and so I could not go on admiring Will's lodgings for ever, especially as there is such a splendid old house close to them—Heaton Place, I mean. Will's church is in the park, you know, but the house is empty, and I think Lord Keston never——"

The girl's words broke off as suddenly as if the stroke of death had closed her lips. Lord Keston! That was the name of the

man against whom her father had warned her ; and from whom she was forbidden to listen to any proposal of marriage. Ah ! how easy *that* would be to promise, while there was only one in all the world from whom she could ever listen to such words ! How more than easy it would be to promise that, if this stranger sought her good will, she would remember that *he* had in some way been her father's enemy, and obliged his living in concealment ! How easy it would be to remember this—easier even than fulfilling her father's other conditions.

"Why didn't you finish your sentence ?" laughed Celia. "But never mind ; you shall tell me all about Heaton Place when we are in Surrey. See, mamma, is beckoning us."

"Mrs. Pennington," said Nora, when breakfast was over, and it was still barely ten o'clock, "I want just to do one or two little errands of shopping before we start ; I will be back in good time for the Guildford train. I will take Hannah," she added rather nervously, "she will be useful to me. No, thank you, Celia ; don't you disarrange any of your plans. Hannah will really be of more use to me than you would ; and, honestly, I would rather have her this morning."

"Remember, Mr. Foster arranged to meet us in the Waterloo station at two," said Celia, when Nora had taken her seat in the carriage, and her maid was sitting opposite ; "and of course you will lunch before you go."

"I will be in time," said Nora, as she nodded a good-bye ; and then they drove away.

Several of those articles of furniture which, though they can be dispensed with—and *are* dispensed with, in a lodging-house—add so materially to the comfort and prettiness of a home, Nora bought for Helen Archer's rooms ; then a few favourite pictures and books ; and then—with Hannah's help in suggesting—a little store of dainties, chosen with that thought and tact which must make the unpacking a series of pleasant surprises. But, remembering her promise to Miss Archer, Nora had not let even her maid see the address she gave at each shop, a full and clear address, which should prove to Helen that there could be no mistake.

When Nora reached home, she found Mrs. Pennington and Celia quite ready to start, but in a dispirited state, because Mrs. Brunton had sent her carriage, and a note for Nora.

"Of course you will not go to her, Nora, dear ?" pleaded Celia, when the urgent invitation had been read. "Think how disappointed Mr. Foster would be ; and you have often refused Mrs. Brunton's invitations without any unwillingness."

It was far harder than Nora had fancied it would be, to set aside their wishes in this, and keep Mrs. Brunton's horses ; but at last she succeeded. She lingered with Mrs. Pennington and Celia to the last moment, making her parting kisses very long

and loving, after which she stood watching them out of sight, with an infinite yearning in her beautiful grave eyes. Then she sat down and wrote a little letter to Mrs. Brunton, thanking her for so kindly acceding to her request, and begging her not to think her capricious or ungrateful because she could not pay her visit after all, though she had with such pleasure looked forward to doing so.

"I see how it is," Mrs. Brunton said to herself, when she read the pathetic letter an hour afterwards. "They have persuaded her to go with them. I am very glad too, though I *had* hoped to have her for these few days. How strange that a short letter, on such a trivial subject, should read so touchingly! If I were a romantic old woman, I could fancy tears had been shed over it."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

She neither weeps,
Nor sighs, nor groans; too strong her agony
For outward sign of anguish.

MADOC.

BARELY half an hour after Mrs. Pennington and her daughter had left for Heaton, in Will Foster's charge, Dr. Armstrong was shown into the shadowy room where Nora sat alone. She rose at once as he approached her, and interrupted his fervid address with her own calm words.

"I have read my father's letter, and I can sign the promises he wishes. Of course I can make them—for my father."

"And a promise from you would, I know, be binding as an oath," said Dr. Armstrong, with a gaze of keenest scrutiny.

"Yes, as sacred," said Nora, simply. "When shall I see my father?"

"As soon as your own heart dictates," he replied, turning his face a little aside. "I am ready to conduct you to him now. What more grateful task could I have than to take his daughter to him?"

"Tell me where he is, please, Dr. Armstrong," begged Nora, the grave, direct inquiry uttered wearily. "I will take Hannah with me. I have no need to trouble you."

For an instant his brow darkened, and his lips parted as if a passionate storm had gathered behind them; but in the next a rapid change came into both face and manner.

"If you really wish it," he said—"if, rather, you insist upon it, Nora—it must be so. I dislike it beyond all words, but you shall have your own will in everything. There is no need for me to bid you keep your father's secret from your maid, of course. I know you too well to think that necessary—you

need not interrupt me so disdainfully, my darling ; I am doing exactly as you desire, for my wish is to be a real help to you now. I will give you all directions. Do not take your own carriage, but the cab in which I came, and which is waiting. Tell the man to drive you to the very house from which he has just brought me. You wish to be without my interference, and your wish shall be fully granted, Nora. When you reach the house, ask for Mr. Harris, as by that name your father is known there. That is all. But," he added, eagerly, "will you not think better of your hard decision, Nora, and let me accompany you, and take all trouble and responsibility from you ?"

No, she would not change her decision ; and Nuel forbore to urge her. He saw her and her maid into the cab, but never attempted himself to give any instructions to the driver ; and then he bowed in silence, and watched them drive away ; while Nora was conscious of a new sensation, almost of gratitude to him.

It was quite an hour afterwards that the cab stopped before one of a tall narrow terrace of houses in an old forgotten-looking street in the north-east of London ; and Nora, looking round her a little wonderingly in this new locality, left Hannah in the cab, and mounted the steep, narrow steps ; while a servant-girl, who was washing them, rose and wiped her hands upon her apron, preparatory to showing this lady over the rooms that were to let.

"Mr. Harris ?"—The girl's face fell a little, but her spirits were buoyed temporarily by curiosity respecting such an unusual visitor.—"Yes, Mr. Harris's rooms on the first floor—the door opposite you as you go upstairs. If he isn't there, he'll be in in a minute.

It was a close and musty room in which Nora had to wait, but she opened the window (which looked as if it had never been raised before) and then sat down near it, with her thoughts too busy to hold these meagre and sombre surroundings. In a few minutes now she would meet face to face the father of whom she used to dream so longingly. Would her heart leap toward him, and dispel at once this miserable insensibility which reproached and pained her in every thought of him ? Would he ever love her as perhaps he might have done if she had been with him all her life, winning her way into his heart ? Would he love her and trust her, simply because she was his daughter ?

She did not know how many minutes she had sat waiting in the silence, when she heard a step upon the stairs, and rose to her feet ; while in this great moment of expectation her heart seemed to cease beating. But when the door opened it was to admit only Dr. Armstrong.

"Nora," he exclaimed, looking really agitated as he came eagerly up to her, "we have a great disappointment to bear ! I found the news at my own rooms, and I hurried here at once to spare

you as much as possible. Nora, my darling, your father has been tracked—or he fancied so—and has gone away again to evade his pursuers. Will you see his letter to me?”

She took the letter mechanically. The clear stiff handwriting had grown familiar to her last night, and there was no word which could not be plainly and easily read.

“I am thankful,” the letter said, “to feel that my child was willing to promise what I felt necessary. Tell her I shall ever feel assured of her guarding that written vow. You say she will bring it with her; then keep it for me, Nuel, for in time to come it will be precious to me as showing my daughter's confidence in me; and soon I hope to see both her and you. They are Keston's agents from whom I am flying now, to elude pursuit, if I can. The life that has been so hard and isolated, may be brightened though in the future by a daughter's love and your faithful friendship, so I shall try to save it as I never tried before. Tell Nora this, and give her my love and blessing. What a happiness it would be for me to think that possibly you might find me and cheer me even yet—you and she! But what right has a shunned and broken-hearted man to dream of such felicity?”

“Do you think, Nora,” asked Dr. Armstrong, watching her steadily after she had read this letter, “that you could ever give up your present careless, easy life, to share such a one as your poor father's has been? I think it is asking too much of you. Mine is different. I am ready at this moment to make the sacrifice—I have long been ready to do so—but then my life is but a solitary one, like your father's; and it has always been my chief, almost my only pleasure, to employ it for you—and yours.”

“I am ready to follow my father,” Nora said, quietly, but in great earnestness. “How can I do so?”

“There is only one way”—in vain Nuel Armstrong tried to speak indifferently now, his effort at assurance was most unsuccessful, and his lips grew dry and inflexible as they formed the words—“only one way, Nora, but your father is evidently dreaming that your love and duty will take you on in your search for him; and I cannot hesitate in showing you this way, and how easy it would be for you, and how brave of you, to follow it. No one but myself can help you. No one could follow and ensure his safety now except myself; and, if you say you are willing to come too, nothing shall stay or hinder me. As your husband, Nora, I will restore you to your father. Only as my wife, dear, can you take a daughter's comfort to him.”

“Let me go alone,” cried Nora, her anguish keen and deep in a new experience of that great loneliness when doubt and sorrow must be one's own alone, and borne in secret.

“Impossible!” protested Nuel, with vehemence. “Only in utter ignorance and inexperience could you propose such a thing, Nora. Besides, I am not quite the senseless, heartless stone

you have always considered me. I have worked for you, and thought of you, now so long without any reward, that I claim one at last. With *you*, I will continue my long assistance to your father. With *you*, I will follow and find him, and release him once more from the burdens which are almost too heavy for him to bear; but *without* you now I will take no further step in his behalf. My own life is not to be spent entirely in your service, Nora, and to win no shadow of return. You see the truth now, and I leave the decision with you. Say *Yes*—a simple *Yes*—to the question which for more than a year has been before you, and we will go together and seek your father, that we may help him. And that shall not be all, Nora," he went on, with growing zeal. "We will be happy, too. Your life shall be smooth, yet filled with change and novelty. I will never let you grow weary, or repent your choice, Nora, darling. Every hour of my life, and every purpose of my heart, shall be devoted to my wife; and your father shall be able to face the world at last."

"Then he is innocent?" asked Nora, breathlessly.

A curious stiffness fell upon Nuel Armstrong's face, and she could not see the sudden closing of his fingers.

"I would it were so," he answered, in a forced slow tone. "I wish in my heart it were so, Nora! But you must know it is not, or you will not understand fully what I offer you. Not only will our marriage save your father's wrecked happiness, Nora, because we can be with him and give him ease and affection; but you must remember also that—with this disgrace upon your name—no other man would seek you as I do."

"Of that," said Nora, in proud, quiet tones, "you know as little as I do, Dr. Armstrong."

"Nonsense!" cried Nuel, his passion growing beyond his control. "I know the world; and its most cruel treatment would be yours, if—But I cannot bear to hurt you. You know as well as I do, that there is but one way for you to act a daughter's part, and I am sure your mind is already made up. The secret of your birth and name will be safe for all your life in *my* keeping, and you will have another name, too, on which no breath of scorn could ever be cast—"

"I wish you had finished," said Nora, as it seemed with only intense weariness; while still a wondrous change had come into her face and even her voice. "I must think over what you have told me."

"You shall, my darling," cried Nuel, with great eagerness, "and I have no fear for your decision. Mrs. Pennington returns on Monday, and you ought to have left London with me by the time they reach home. How soon may I come to learn your arrangements, Nora?"

"Then. On Monday," said Nora, steadily.

"One thing I ought to tell you," he said, unwillingly as it seemed, yet irresistibly urged on by that brave, steady light within her eyes whose meaning he feared. "It is only through your marriage with me now, Nora, that you can continue to possess the money in possession of which you so intensely delight. In the letter of trust, held by Doyle, your grandfather says you are to forfeit your wealth if you ever make one step towards tracing your father, or assisting and solacing him. I think it wise—and kind, too—to tell you this, Nora; for you would be a miserable girl now, deprived of the luxuries you value so much. Of course, as my wife, this could never be. Even if the fact were known—and I need not *let* it be known—you would still enjoy the money; for it would be mine, by law, after you forfeited it; and what is mine will always be yours too, as you know, my darling."

"You are generous," said Nora, the words quietly passing her white lips. "You are generous in your *thoughts* as well as in your words and acts. My forfeited wealth is but a poor return to make to you, Dr. Armstrong."

"One thing more I had better tell you, Nora," he said, his suppressed wrath growing, because he could not comprehend her, and while he saw how brave she looked in all her misery. "You have promised, in this letter which I hold—with a promise as sacred, you yourself confessed, as an oath—never to listen to a proposal of marriage from your father's enemy, Lord Keston. Lord Keston is now—and was when you made that promise—the man whom you have hitherto known as Mark Poyntz. My darling," he cried, starting forward, terrified by the whiteness of her face, "why should *this* move you? But it is the heat, perhaps. This room is close and stifling. We will leave it now. We will never speak again," he added, hurriedly and nervously, "of this man who has vented so much spleen and revenge on your broken-hearted father. When he returns from Florence—where he went to attend the death-bed of the late baron, and claim the title himself—we shall be gone. You shall never undergo the humiliation of his knowing whose daughter you are, and turning from you in his arrogance; never, my dear. I would die sooner. Now shall we go? I have told you all that I felt it my painful duty to tell you, before I let you promise me this pretty hand, which I have sought so long and done so much to win. Now let us go. I know your father's secret is as safe in his daughter's keeping as he has lately felt it to be in mine. Shall I go back with you, Nora, or would you still be alone? Just make a choice, darling, and you shall do exactly as you wish. I will see you on Monday—not before, if you do not desire it. My one ambition always is to do just what you wish, my love. Only, only," he added, trying to smile naturally into her face, "do not look so coldly at me, Nora. Oh, my darling, blame me

if you will, reproach me, defy me, command me—*anything*, only speak to me, or give me even one of the old wilful glances.”

“Dr. Armstrong,” said Nora, turning her eyes fully upon him now, but with such fire in them that he could not meet their gaze, “give me back the old feelings which you yourself took from me. Give me the old trust, and the old credulity, and the old innocence of wrong. If you cannot—as you cannot,” the girl avowed, the passion dying suddenly out of both her voice and eyes “do not mention those old times to me.”

Quite silently Nuel Armstrong followed her from the room, and down the narrow staircase; and it was only when she was in the cab with Hannah, and he was closing the door with a smiling farewell, that he ventured to remind her that he should call early on Monday.

How silent and empty the pretty home felt when Nora returned to it that afternoon! Yet while the minutes were so solitary, and her thoughts so sad, the hours of the summer evening seemed to *fly* from her. There were so few more to spend in this beautiful spot where she had been so happy. Strange it was; but the acute anguish of her new knowledge seemed softened here into only the quiet, speechless grief of a long farewell to the old scenes. Perhaps this was from her own bravery in putting away other thoughts that day.

Sunday dawned, as lovely a day as even Celia could have desired for its enjoyment in Will Foster's country home; and Nora, in her solitude, followed her friends in the peaceful village and quaint old church, and even smiled a little as she pictured Celia's fresh and frank delight. Then her thoughts clung about the older friends and scenes. At Traveere, with Kitty—Rachel—old Breen—Borak—and even the squirrel at the Vicarage. What was Micky doing in that pretty garden at Heaton, and how did that solitary delicate lady, who was his mistress, spend her Sunday evenings? She must have spent so many, *all* still and solitary, like this one which was so new to Nora. Did they grow easier and better at last, or did women grow braver when their girlhood was quite gone—gone in this strange, quick way, never to come again? What would Will preach about to-night? And Mr. Pennington, far away in Kilver, would he preach of what would help anyone who had a *something* that was very hard to bear? And would anyone listen to him from that old seat of hers, where she had sat to listen to him so many and many a Sunday long ago? Was it very long ago? Yes, *very* long ago; for she was a girl then—quite a girl.

But there was one name her thoughts could not touch even in their quiet bravery through the lonely Sunday hours; for they dared not touch it tenderly just then, and they could not touch it with doubt or coldness.

It was not until the rest of the household were in bed and

she sat in the deep and utter night-silence, that she opened her desk and began to write. Her first letter was to Mr. Doyle, and she wrote it fast and nervously. She had forfeited her wealth, she told him, by attempting to unravel the mystery of her father's life, and following him, with the intention of joining him. She thanked her guardian for all his care of her, and his unfailing kindness to her; and begged him to understand that, though she had not known that she must relinquish her wealth if she attempted reconciliation with her father, she would have acted exactly the same if she *had* known it. Then she begged him to forgive her any vexation or trouble which her conduct might cause him, and to believe that she could never remember him but as her kind and generous guardian.

When this letter was folded and sealed, she sat silent a few minutes, with her eyes covered. Then, slowly and tremulously, she took another sheet of paper, and, without addressing it definitely either to Mrs. Pennington or Celia, wrote her farewell to both.

"I shall be gone from your lives when you return," she wrote, after her touching thanks for all they had been to her—not only lately, but through her lonely girlhood—"and I know now that I never ought to have been in them. It will give trouble and pain to you all; but for me there will be, as long as I live, the grateful, bright remembrance of your love and help. Oh! Celia,"—the tears which all day had been so far from the sad eyes, fell here unchecked—"this has been a happy day for you, and the thought of that has done me good! I have tried to think of happy things all day; so, when you look back, and remember how *you* enjoyed it, don't be sorry, thinking it had been all miserable for me. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

If any touch my friend, or his good name,
It is my honour and my love, to free
His blasted fame
From the least spot or thought of blame.

GEORGE HERBERT.

WILLOUGHBY FOSTER travelled back to London with his guests on Monday afternoon; resolved to exhibit in no half-light his irritation against Nora's neglect of his invitation, and to prove himself highly and justly injured, beyond the power of her soothing—either by unusual apologies or by her usual merry unconcern. Yet, even as he propped and strengthened his resolution (which had been built suddenly on the arrival of the Penningtons at Heaton without her) he was perfectly and uncomfortably aware that her very first smile would utterly dis-

arm him of all wrath and resentment ; and that all that was best and sunniest in his nature would even then, as ever, go out to meet her. So, in spite of his reiterated assurances to himself that he was justifiably angry with her, it was a great disappointment to him to find that she had not returned before them.

"Mrs. Brunton is always so tiresome in pressing guests to stay," he fumed, pacing the quiet drawing-room. "Shall I go over for Nora, Mrs. Pennington?"

Mrs. Pennington reflected for a few moments.

"Mrs. Brunton mentioned particularly in her note that she would herself see Nora home. You will dine with us, Willoughby, and, if they do not come to dinner, the carriage shall go afterwards."

"Or may I take her own ponies?" inquired Will, complacently cheerful at the thought. She will enjoy driving them home."

"Will it not be too dusk then?"

"Oh, no!" cried Will, with eagerness. "I will start directly dinner is over."

Even Celia felt impatient. She had so many things to discuss with Nora, so many experiences to compare and incidents to relate—and indeed so much to marvel over in Will's new and uncharacteristic despondency—that she could hardly accept the disappointment of two whole hours to be spent without her. Even Will's presence at the dinner-table could not quite suffice to make the meal a blissful one for little Miss Pennington; yet it was in reality as much for his sake as her own that she fretted. Really, after disappointing him of her company at Heaton, Nora might have been thoughtful and generous enough to be at home to receive him; and, even if not that, she might have returned in time to dine with him, after his escorting them all the way from Heaton—now, too, just when he seemed so heavy-hearted and unlike himself.

She noticed that Will followed her at once from the dining room, and that Nora's ponies were even then waiting at his order; so she stood and watched him drive off, making a pretty picture, with the roses all around her. But he turned only for one instant, and did not seem to see her while he raised his hat. The night was so cool and fair, after the dusty day, that Celia strolled round to the terrace above the river, and sat there in idle enjoyment, her thoughts, as usual, slight and restful, even through her new vague uneasiness.

Mrs. Pennington, after her usual half-hour's rest, joined her daughter; and they took tea out in the calm and fragrant twilight, chatting over there Heaton visit, and expressing their surprise at Nora's having changed her plans.

"If she came away at once with Willoughby," Mrs. Pennington said, looking at her watch, when she had given her cup to the servant, "they could be here in a few minutes."

"Scarcely," observed Celia, reflecting, "unless Will had driven very fast, and had chanced to find Nora quite ready to leave. Even then he would be too polite not to stay with Mrs. Brunton a little; and—— Why, mamma, here he is!"

As she spoke, Celia rose and made a movement as if to meet him; then she stopped as if she were startled, and waited for him to speak.

"I have been," he said, hurriedly, after those moments of silence, "and Nora is not there—has never been there. Mrs. Brunton has not seen her since you left for Guildford on Saturday. The carriage returned from here empty, and the servant brought a note from Nora, excusing herself with an apology, and a pretty—— I saw the note, Mrs. Pennington. Where can she be? Oh! Celia, what are we to do?"

He was gazing at them in the blankest wonder and uncertainty, and Celia's question grew into a cry as she met his gaze, and felt a vague consciousness of misery closing round them.

"Oh! Will, what can it mean?"

"I thought something miserable was coming," he said, talking fast in his restlessness and fear, as it had always been his nature to do. "For three or four days now—ever since Poyntz went away—I have felt that some sorrow was shaping itself to me, and I've tried my best to elude its grasp; but it has come at last, I think. Where are we to look for Nora? If Poyntz were here——"

Perhaps it was the sudden recollection of Mark's departure, and the insight it had given him into a love stronger, quieter, and more daring than his own; or perhaps it was Celia's gentle touch upon his hand, as he stopped brokenly, that made Will turn abruptly away, pressing his hand upon his eyes and sobbing like a girl. And Celia let this unlooked-for agitation have its way, but she stood beside him with the unuttered sympathy which he could not fail to feel.

"I think," said Mrs. Pennington, her own tears flowing gently, "that we had better question the servants."

So, avoiding a glance at Will, she rose and entered the house through one of the open French windows. The hint had been taken quickly, and, even before the bell was answered, young Foster had followed her, and, without attempting to hide the redness of his anxious eyes, he waited to see if any light could be thrown on Nora's absence.

All that the servants knew was soon told. Miss St. George had stayed at home all the time, with the exception of two drives she took—Will's start of joy and relief was unconcealed when he heard this, and from that moment his old eager hopefulness seemed to return. Miss St. George had sent a note by Mrs. Brunton's servant, but remained herself at home. Early in the afternoon—yes, Saturday afternoon—Dr. Armstrong had called, and

had stayed about half an hour. At the time he left, Miss St. George had taken her maid with her, and engaged the cab which had brought Dr. Armstrong. She had been absent with Hannah about three or four hours, and then returned and dined. All day on Sunday Miss St. George had stayed at home, spending nearly all the time in the garden, and certainly not seeming so happy and cheerful as usual. On Monday morning she had sent for a cab and driven away, with a box which she had packed herself, before Hannah was up. And they had all thought, Hannah especially, that Miss St. George was going then to pay the visit she had declined on Saturday, as she sent her order to the cabman for Mrs. Brunton's house.

The particulars, beyond this, were all supplied by Hannah, and Will excitedly made her repeat them again and again. Her mistress had not told her where she was going that morning, but had given the driver Mrs. Brunton's address, through the footman. She had bidden her good-bye twice, and given her several presents, and was even kinder that morning than usual, the girl said—growing herself dimly conscious of a possible sorrow in the air—much more quiet too, and rather heavy-hearted, it seemed. She did not know what her young mistress had packed. She supposed it was merely a dinner-dress. As she knew her mistress was away for the night, she had not intended to look over her wardrobe until next morning, as this day had been given her for a holiday.

"I must go again to Mrs. Brunton's," cried Will, when every scrap of information had been extracted from the servants, "and then I shall go home. It is possible Nora may be spending to-day there."

"I think," said Mrs. Pennington, though feeling it very unlikely that Nora would voluntarily seek a day's intercourse with Will's sisters, "that will be best. Then of course you will go to Dr. Armstrong's rooms."

"No," returned Will, deep in thought, "I will telegraph to him."

He was just leaving the room, when Celia entered it, gasping, and bathed in tears.

"Oh, mamma," she cried, "it isn't a dinner-dress that Nora took! I've been to see, and all her plain dresses are gone, and her cloaks, and—— Oh, mamma, she's gone to stay; I—I can see she has."

Her words and tears had arrested Will like a blow, but, even before the mother and daughter had met in their distress, he was gone, his cheeks aflame with a new pang and horror which he could not comprehend; while he told himself again and again—speaking aloud in his great earnestness—first that Nora had been kidnapped; then that he should find her at his mother's: then that Dr. Armstrong had tempted her to spend this day in the

country or on the river ; and then that she had rushed on some Quixotic errand of kindness, and in her ignorance had miscalculated the time it would take her.

The beauty of the summer night was not very fair or striking in Great Cumberland Place ; but, if it had been so, Willoughby would not have known or noticed it, as he rushed from the carriage up to the door of his mother's house, and pulled the bell until its vibration seemed to fill the silent street. He passed the astonished servants who opened the door to him, and mounted the stairs at a rush.

"Really, Willoughby," pleaded his sister Genevieve, when he had burst into the drawing-room, and had told in one breath the motive of his visit, "we ought to have a little warning before such a surprise as this. As probably Miss St. George has once again indulged her peculiar fancy for roaming alone in the lowest parts of Lambeth, I should suggest that neighbourhood as the best to be searched. I wonder you suspect her of anything so common-place as coming to *our* house, or seeking *our* society."

"I didn't," blurted out Will ; "but I could not afford to miss even the faintest chance of tracing her, and I thought one of you might possibly, even if you hadn't seen her, have something to suggest which might help me."

"Dear, dear," cried Mrs. Foster, grieved by her son's anxiety, and longing to relieve him, "what can we suggest, Gena ?"

"Probably we might suggest several things," returned Miss Foster, her tones even a little colder and clearer than usual. "How would it be, Willoughby, if you telegraphed to Mr. Poynz, asking *him* about Miss St. George's present abode ?"

"If you were not my own sister, Genevieve," cried Will, his cheeks flaming, and his eyes wide and hot in his anger, "I would never let you suggest another thing to me again as long as I lived !"

"Of course," interposed Mrs. Foster, pacifically, "Mr. Poynz—Lord Keston I ought to say, though—can know nothing of this. How sorry I am about it, Willoughby ! I will go back with you to Mrs. Pennington."

"Thank you, mother," said Will, his brief wrath sinking now in the strong under-current of emotion. "Put on your bonnet at once then, please. I have not a moment to spare."

"Have you seen Dr. Armstrong, Willoughby ?" questioned his younger sister, without looking up at him. "He was to have called here to-day, and did not. Do you think *he* could tell you anything of Nora ? Perhaps she has been to him."

"Not very likely," said Will, heavily. "I telegraphed to him on my way—of course I would not let any chance escape me—but Nora never cared to be with Armstrong."

"I have my doubts of that," returned Victoria. Her temper

had not been improved by Dr. Armstrong's dereliction, and she almost welcomed this little vent for it. "It may suit her to exhibit a preference for you, but I happen to know on the best authority, that she has been *very particularly* fond of Dr. Armstrong all her life."

"Who knows more of Nora, you or I?" inquired Will, pettishly. "Armstrong tells lies if he says she is fond of him beyond——"

"Beyond what?"

"Oh, I can't wait to explain! You ought to understand. Go and hurry mother, will you?" But the next moment, without heeding his sister's cool disregard of the privilege of assisting him, Will was on the stairs himself, calling to hasten Mrs. Foster.

"I don't suppose that I shall be any help, my dear," she murmured, plaintively, as her son hurried her out to the carriage; "but Mrs. Pennington may like to have me with her."

"Of course she will, mother; you are ages beyond the girls in kindness and sympathy. Jump in. You won't mind my taking you in a hurry to-night?"

They drove straight back; for Will, in his great restlessness and his characteristic hopefulfulness, told himself now that they might find Nora at home waiting for him, surprised—amused too, perhaps—by their alarm. But the moment the hall-door was opened to them he knew that Nora had not come.

"I shall go off at once," he said, turning to leave the house again, and addressing no one in particular, while the two elder ladies shook hands tearfully, and Celia's face was buried on the couch. "I shall go to Scotland Yard, and then telegraph to Doyle, and then to Poynz; then I shall advertise; and then—— Oh, I beg your pardon! I'm very sorry Doctor Armstrong. I nearly knocked you down; didn't I?"

As young Foster's head had harmlessly butted against Dr. Armstrong's chest for a moment, just on a level with his shoulders, the danger the physician had escaped could scarcely have ruffled his countenance to the extent to which it was ruffled; yet, considering his calm reception of Mrs. Foster's news, that too could scarcely have done it. Celia, who had started eagerly to her feet on the chance of his bringing tidings of Nora, stood wondering and frightened when she saw the change in his usually smooth and placid features.

"Telegraph!" he repeated, with a sneer, when Mr. Foster had run excitedly through his disordered plans. "And do you think Poynz will telegraph back to you? A man who lays his own plans so cunningly will not help you in yours—to defeat him. And a greedy old fool like Doyle is not likely to lose his richest client for Nora's sake, or your sake, or my sake. Advertise as you like; do you suppose the papers need reach her—in Florence?"

"I will do as I choose!" cried Will, in the very madness of wrath, and fear, and hatred of all suspicion. "I will use what means I choose; and none of your vile unchristian surmises touch me."

"Wherever Nora may be," said Celia, with all her old gentleness, but with a new firmness in her voice, as she came and stood by Will, "she has gone for some good purpose, if she has gone of her own will. And she will not leave us in suspense, if— if—— Will, don't start so terribly! It is only the postman."

Five minutes after that, Mrs. Pennington and Celia had read the letter Nora had written to them the day before—had read the few loving lines through blinding tears—and Will had gone out alone on his irregular, impetuous search; while Dr. Armstrong stood like a man turned to stone.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

No steady power
To draw the line of comfort that divides
Calamity; the chastisement of Heaven
From the injustice of our brother-man.

WORDSWORTH.

ON the same Monday afternoon, Miss Archer arrived at her new lodgings, in a certain sleepy little terrace laying sideways in Canonbury Lane. She had driven thither from the West-end hotel at which she had been staying with her last pupil; and so perhaps that was why there struck such a chill to her heart, as she stood in the narrow passage of the small house, in its unlovely situation. She paid the man who had put her boxes down beside her, and still she hesitated, looking without and within. This was to be her home, and she was trying to teach herself at once to feel it so. Highbury Crescent, where her new pupil lived, was within a few minutes' walk, even on these hot August days; and her two little rooms would be neat and clean; so why should she hesitate to enter them; Could she not make them as much home as any other lodgings had been during the long years through which there had been no one but herself to make home for her?

Leaving her luggage blocking the passage, Helen entered the little sitting-room, with her slow tired step. She knew the room well; she knew everything that would meet her eyes. The sultry, brick-coloured curtains; the two orange-coloured chromo-landscapes, in their black frames; the grim horsehair couch, and the few fancy articles in white crochet-work, draping the upright wooden backs of the chairs against the wall. She knew it all—the tired woman who had known so many rooms and yet been

almost a stranger in all—and so, when she turned the handle of the door, she sighed a little in real heart-weariness.

But, when she had passed the threshold, the weariness fell from her in her great surprise. Where was the grim, unlovely little room she had known and engaged? And where were the objects with which she had been trying to familiarise herself before she entered? The bow-window, clean and bright, was shaded by soft white drapery, which checked the glare, but not the light or air. The chromos were gone, and pure, mellow-toned engravings, with white margins and narrow gilded frames, made the walls look cool as well as beautiful. The slippery horsehair sofa had vanished, and in its place were a small luxurious couch and a low easy-chair, with a pale green covering, cool as spring-time. The old stiff chair was gone from the bow-window, and in its place were a pretty work-table and a low working-chair; and on another light little table against the wall lay a few books, the titles of which made Helen's heart flutter with delighted anticipation. And there, in the centre of all, the one thing she could recollect, was the stiff round table, the ugliness of which was hidden by a pale green cloth, the tint and texture of which were soft and tempting to the eyes and fingers. And here a dainty little tea was spread, as unlike a lodging-house meal as any Helen had ever taken. The pretty green china, with its affluence of gilding; the vase of roses; the peaches nestling among cool green leaves; the whole freshness and fragrance and coolness of the beautiful little room could be due to but one source, as Helen knew; and while she stood there, dazzled and bewildered in her gratitude, she uttered Nora's name, in a strange, low, intense way, as if it could not be kept within her heart, but passed her lips in spite of her.

And just then the folding-doors which led into her bed-room opened, and she could have seen that that room was changed as much as the sitting-room, if she had looked. But she did not look. How could she, when from the doorway came Nora herself, and put her arms about her, and kissed her; and then stroked her white cheek, and kissed her again; and then laughed a little to see how Helen was taken by surprise; and then took off her bonnet and kissed her again, and laughed a little more; and then Nora began to talk of *home*—just as if Helen had returned to her childhood's home, to find it precisely what she remembered, and to receive greetings from a whole loving family—and then put Helen into the little easy-chair, with unfeigned pride and delight; and kissed her again, and told her how good it was to see her dear, dear face, and how the tea was ready, and how there was a little breeze coming in at last! Then quite suddenly, as she knelt at Helen's feet, Nora hid the eyes that had been so brave, and kind, and cheering, and was conquered by a passionate flood of tears which literally terrified Miss Archer, while

she cried too, in a joy as vague and uncomprehended as was Nora's misery.

"Oh! Helen," whispered Nora, rising when she heard Miss Archer's sobs, "how could I forget myself and greet you so? Come with me now and bathe your face, and see if you like your room; and—may I ring for tea?"

"I—I don't know," faltered Helen. "I have not bought anything yet."

"No, but Mrs. Prin—that's your landlady's name, isn't it—says there's everything in your cupboard. She will scarcely need to buy anything, she says, for days and days. Are you ready?"

Tea was over, and Helen Archer, rested and refreshed, sat at the open window, holding Nora's hand in hers; because, she said, it was so hard to believe that the unexpected happiness of her home-coming had not been a dream, unless she saw or felt Nora's presence. And all this time the girl stood behind her, leaning against the back of her chair, and looking over her head out into the twilight, with a sad gravity in her lovely eyes.

"How long will they spare you to me, Nora?" Helen asked, her heart heavy at the thought of parting with her dear friend, yet feeling just then that she could never really lose her again; even though Nora had not once to-day referred to a possible time when they should live together, as she had so lovingly done at their last meeting. "Who will come for you, dear?"

"No one."

Nora gave this answer very quietly, as she still stood behind Helen's chair, looking out upon the strip of summer sky.

"Oh, Nora, I see why that is!" said Helen, in a troubled voice, which was broken by a cough. "I asked you not to tell my address, forgetting that you would keep a promise, even if you yourself must suffer; and so you are going back alone."

"The keeping of that promise," Nora returned, very low, "will prove an untold blessing to me, Helen, because I could not be with you if others knew where you were; and I have no home now but what you may give me. Oh, my dear, don't look so grieved and startled! I ought to have told you gradually, or—or not at all; but you are so good, and have always been so loving to me. I know you will keep me with you now. I will not be a great burden to you, Helen. I will work very hard. I have had my holiday, and I ought to work now. I am ready to work—to work for us both, I hope and trust—if you will only help me a little just at first."

"But Nora, my love, what does it mean?"

Helen had tried to rise, but Nora laid her hands upon her shoulders, and held her gently in her seat. Helen must not see the great pain it was to tell of these last few days.

"I was to have had you with me in ease and idleness," she said,

with a wan smile. "I was to have given you health and strength in other countries, and rest after your long teaching. But now—oh! Helen, it breaks my heart to come to you as I come now, after dreaming of such a different meeting, and of what I might possibly give you in return for all the good you did me and taught me, in that past year which would have been so dreary to me but for your love!"

"But is it true?" faltered Helen, while her weak breath hurried, and the tears filled her eyes. "It cannot be."

"It is quite true," said Nora, steadily. "That home I told you of on Friday in the park—you remember? How the sun was shining, and how happy everyone was!—that pretty home where I have been so happy all the summer, is mine no more. And the fortune I valued so, which was to make you well—I mean which gave me everything I wished for; and not only myself, but—My fortune is gone, Helen, and my friends—true as they have been to me—can be friends to me no longer. Not that it is their fault. Oh, no! Don't look that question, Helen. They are true and good as ever, and—and will be kind to others. It is only *I* who must never join them again. But oh! Helen, how can you trust me, when I dare not tell you why?"

"Nora, my darling," returned Helen, taking the girl's hot hands in hers, "If you tell no other word I trust you implicitly. But—think a little, dear, before you answer me—have you been frightened at all, or deceived? Does no one—no single person know this resolution of yours?"

"No. If they knew it could not be carried out," she answered, every word an effort to her, though she went bravely on. "It is only by not seeing them again that I can keep a solemn vow which I have made; and so, save one, who is very near to me, and has the first claim upon me—I may not tell you more, Helen. Oh, pray, pray trust me without! It is hard to me to bear a secret. I have never had any experience in secrets all my life, and I should betray it to them—to anyone but you, whose life it cannot change, and who have always helped me so."

"Will not Mr. Poyntz know?" began Helen, wondering why the words came so readily, but never wondering why Nora stopped them in such strange subdued haste.

"He would know if he saw me. He—he would know all in a minute. I could not keep anything from *him*, Helen—not anything. And that is why I dare not see him. For it is not *my* secret, and—he is never to know it; he—of all men; he—most of all who—care for me."

"Do not pain yourself so cruelly to tell me, dear," pleaded Helen, purposely now avoiding any glance into the girl's face. "But did Dr. Armstrong advise you? Shall you not see *him*?"

"Never again—never again, I hope!" cried Nora, a sudden shudder running through her frame. "Oh, Helen, keep me away from him!"

"I will keep you with me always, if I may," said Helen, with the earnestness of a dying promise; as she turned at last and put her arms round the girl who had appealed to her in such wistful, child-like fashion. "I only want you to be quite sure, my darling, that you are not deceived. From the first, I saw how Dr. Armstrong had determined to win you; and I guessed that no trifling scruple of conscience could check him. If *he* has been frightening and grieving you, just to——"

"All that he said was true," whispered Nora, brokenly and below her breath. "I know now that it was all true; but—oh, Helen, I wish you understood! I may never tell anyone—even that I am not what they think me; and so I may never speak to them, or see them. I have forfeited my wealth; and—I belong to no one. So, Helen"—with a faint, pitiful smile—"instead of having come to help you, I have come to beg a home with you; but only just until I can earn one for myself. I am used to poverty; I do not fear *that*. I only fear being, even for a time, a burden to you, and—and being seen again by—those who belong to my old life."

"But it will be so dreary for you here, my darling, with no one but me."

"Oh, Helen, just think what it would be without you!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Sweet
All the ways that feel her feet;
From the empire of her eyes
Light takes life and darkness flies.

SWINBURNE.

"NORA, indeed, indeed, I cannot consent to that!"

It was late the same night, and Miss Archer and Nora at last were about to separate, after a long and almost cheerful conversation, which had not touched again upon the subject so near the heart of both. Nora had gone with Helen into the pretty freshly-decorated chamber behind the sitting-room, and had helped her to unpack, and now she was bidding her "good night," because her own room, she said, was up-stairs—far away in a cool, retired region.

"Nora, indeed, indeed, I cannot consent to that!" Helen said, again, her troubled voice broken by a fit of coughing. "For you to have a little bare and dismal room up there, barren of all comfort even, and for me to have everything here"——

"I like it very much," put in Nora, sitting down with the determination now to wait until Helen was quite at ease about her, and making her so by her own easy piquancy. "I engaged it for myself before you arrived, so you have no right to interfere,

Miss Archer. It is a room highly adapted for thought and meditation. Everything there encourages reflection—except perhaps, the looking-glass—and I have a great deal to reflect upon, Helen. All day to-morrow I shall sit there and make plans, but first I shall take a good night's sleep—oh, no fear of that, my dear!—and I shall not try to form any plans till daylight. Would you, if you were I? What sort of a prospect do you think this street holds out for a singer of Irish ballads? I know a good many, and I can make my upper notes very telling, with a gasp upon them in the usual style. I don't think I shall hire a baby, Helen—would you? I have never given so much, or so willingly, to a singer with a baby. It's *something*, you see, to have a baby, and the girls without one looked so much more unquestionably forlorn."

"Oh, hush!" cried Helen, hastily, though she smiled too at Nora's ease and unconcern.

"I could drive a cab, easily and very creditably," Nora went on, apparently pursuing her train of thought as her own amusement; "but women don't turn to that profession as a rule—perhaps they would be too easily led into the error of taking legitimate fares, and so bring bankruptcy to their employers, and spoil a system. No, that won't do well. Sometimes I have felt sure I could write a splendid romance, teeming with interest, and earn a fortune by it. But I begin to think that description would baffle me. For instance, I could not possibly treat a hero's hat picturesquely; and I don't see how I could take him through three whole volumes without his needing to wear or carry one, do you? My heroine I could manage beautifully in every particular; and she should have such an immense wardrobe that I could never be short of material to spread out my chapters."

"Nora," said Miss Archer, very sadly, "poverty has a wider meaning than you fancy, I'm afraid, dear. One can bear denial in one's own person, but there is a bitter calculation it necessitates. And it is sent as often to those who are lavish and generous in their tastes as to those who are very simple or—selfish."

"That is quite true," responded Nora, bravely; "but it does not make me fear to bear it, Helen. It only teaches me how impossible it is for us to judge each other; because I feel just the same, now I can do nothing, as I did on Friday, when everything seemed in my power. Even Borak," she added presently, turning the subject, "will fancy I have quite forgotten him, won't he, Helen? For he will miss many extra luxuries and enjoyments he has had this summer. And Kitty, and——"

"Nora, you were kind and generous to all, when the money was yours, dear," said Miss Archer, with a gentle touch upon the girl's bent head. "Can I ever forget what you were so prompt to do for me? No; no loss of money can prevent *your* being brave and generous."

"But I am so unfit to—to work well, Helen. Oh! if I had but known, that I might have prepared. You see, at first I had no money at all, and then I had too much; and now I have none at all again. And—and," she added, sorrowfully, as Helen turned away with one of her swift, sharp attacks of coughing, "now, after all my waiting, I must do you harm instead of good."

"Under any circumstances, and at any time, you must do me good, as long as anything on earth *can* do me good. Do you remember," Helen added, gently, flushing a little as she spoke, "telling me a few words Mr. Poyntz once asked you to remember, Nora—*Nobly borne is nobly done*"?

It was at Traveere," said Nora, hurriedly turning from the recollection, as if an aching wound were touched. "I wonder how they all are at Traveere—the old cats, and Bran, and Kitty's pet pig, and—and all. Now, Helen, are you ready to say 'Good night'?"

But still she had no intention of going until she had seen Miss Archer in bed, and had put her cough-drops ready to her hand, and a glass of lemonade; while Helen told her she had not been so lovingly and willingly waited on since she was a child. Then Nora put out the light and kissed her in the darkness, trying to feel, for one moment, that she kissed the Helen Archer of old times, who had not the hectic flush upon her cheeks, and the sunken look in her meek eyes.

It was no new thing now for Helen's nights to be wakeful and disturbed, but this one would have been far more so if she had known how every cough of hers carried a sharp pain to Nora's heart; and how the girl, in her great wakefulness, lay and listened for them as for a stroke which she knew must descend upon her at stated times. Yet, next morning, it was Nora who awoke Helen with a kiss, and laid a dainty little breakfast-tray beside her.

"Oh! Nora," she cried, starting up, "how could I have slept so late, and given you this trouble? Shall I be late at my duties?"

"No, quite early," smiled Nora, arranging the tray. "I don't want you to be hurried, but, as you have a day of teaching before you, it is better not to be up too soon."

"Oh! Nora, where did—did the ham and all come from?"

"Your pantry," returned Nora, looping back the white curtains of the bed. "Helen, what step shall I take to-day towards getting an engagement? I ought to apply somewhere, even while you are away, yet I am so afraid of going out."

"Not on any account must you think of it while I am away," cried Helen, her anxiety bringing on her cough again. "You must promise me this, Nora—you must faithfully promise me that you will not go out alone."

Though Nora could not quite understand the motive. she

promised gladly, really relieved and grateful. And she said cheerfully that she should find many things to do that day, and swallowed the lump which had risen in her throat while Helen so kindly and anxiously delayed her attempt to seek a means of helping her.

"I don't know how it is," Helen said, as Nora started her off comfortably, "that I have lately fallen into a bad habit of sleeping late in the morning. But for you, I should have been late to-day; and the idleness has been growing upon me lately."

"Come home as early as you can," pleaded Nora, looking hastily away from Miss Archer's face, as she recalled the broken night, and the great weariness which the morning hours must bring. "I shall be looking for you from the moment you pass out of my sight now."

Unused as Nora was to steady application, this day at any rate was an exceptional one in her life. She finished unpacking for herself and Helen, and put her finishing touches to the three little rooms; and then she sat down, away from the window, and worked hard and steadily, to finish an exquisite little banner-screen which she had been making as a present for Mrs. Pennington. She put it aside at tea-time, that she might have everything prepared for Helen's return; and then, when the meal was laid, and Helen's chair and slippers were ready, she went back to it, and had finished it when at last she saw Helen pass the window, and went out into the passage to meet her. Very wistfully Miss Archer scanned the girl's face when they met, but she could only guess at the struggle Nora had had to win back that easy pretty nonchalance which it gave Helen such rest and such happiness to see.

When they had finished tea, Nora showed the work on which she had been employed nearly all day. She had hesitated to do so, because there somehow seemed a satire now in its very elegance and richness; but evidently Helen did not see this, for a light broke upon her face the moment she looked at it, and, while she laid it down, still looking at it, with her hands in her lap, as if to touch it must needs hurt it, she smiled in real and unfeigned delight.

"We will not go to seek a situation for you yet, Nora," she said. "The very thought has made my heart heavy all day. But we will go and—and—don't be hurt, dear—we will show this; and I think you will not need to ask for teaching then. You will like this work better, and I shall be at rest about you, knowing you are here, and—it must be for such a little time. Shall we go at once?"

"Oh, please let us wait until it is dark!" pleaded Nora. "I am so afraid. I think I left no possibility of anyone tracing me: but—I am so afraid."

So they waited for the friendly dusk, and then set out. Not having lost her old nature with her old life, Nora could find amusement for Helen, and to all appearance for herself, even in the uninteresting walk through Islington and along the Holloway Road; but yet Helen could feel how the girl sometimes shrank to her side, as the groups they met pushed roughly past, or turned and stared into her face.

"This is very new to you, Nora," said Miss Archer, her kindly heart sinking as she thought of her own narrow unprotected life being all Nora had to share. "You never walked at night before, in just this kind of throng."

"Never," assented Nora, with that ready tact of hers which was born of innate sympathy, and which clothed the truth always pleasantly, "because I have never walked *here* before; and I have learnt to know, Helen, that every street or road in London has its distinct class of frequenters. Until you had tried, and studied the matter, you would scarcely believe how many grades and shades there are, all varying in some way. There, don't you see how I have studied the subject?"

"Wait, dear," said Helen, suddenly stopping before a small lighted shop—the shutters were already put up, but Nora could see that it seemed to be filled with gentlemen's slippers and caps—"I think I will ask here. Leave it all to me please, Nora."

Behind the counter in the little shop a genial-looking, bald old man sat casting up accounts, with a diminutive young lady who bore stolidly a weight of golden plats which would have overpowered an ordinary female of her size. Helen Archer went up at once to her and the old man, and gently and courteously asked if they would buy the screen she so carefully unfolded from its double covering, while she glanced up nervously at Nora, as if entreating her silence. But Nora was, as usual, deep in pleasant and altogether inventive observation. This old gentleman was the master of the shop; and he had an old wife in the house, with soft gray hair; and he would not let her come into the shop to tire herself and make her grow bald, as he had done. He liked her not to belong to the shop at all; and when he joined her he forgot all about the shop himself; and they played duets every night, he on the flute, and she on the piano. And all their children were married, and came to see them at Christmas-time, with a crowd of little children. And then this girl with the gold plats was invited to a dance, and did not look a bit as she looked now at Helen; and never all the evening spoke superciliously and hardly, as she spoke now. And at last she married, and had the shop; and the old couple went to live by the river, and had a garden; and grew younger and older at the same time, until their life was rounded—

"Come, come, that is very absurd, you know! If you asked an ordinary price, I could, perhaps order another; but fifteen

shillings is outrageous. I shall not get that for it myself. Which of you made it?"

"I did," said Nora, arrested by the question, and wondering, rather amusedly, why they should not be addressed as "Madam," a dignity which her whole experience of shopping had taught her to expect. "Do you like it?" she added, evidently with very little idea of a would-be seller of fancy articles being regarded in a different light from a lavish purchaser of the same. "I hope you do, and will commission me to make another."

"I will, my dear," the old man answered, with spontaneous heartiness; I will give you twelve shillings for this, and ten for another the same. It is a ridiculous price, but I like to encourage the young. When shall I expect the pair?"

"You must say twelve shillings for each, at least," put in Helen, fancying that the meek demand was made with daring and determination—until it melted utterly away under the old gentleman's genial laugh and generous bestowal of a half-sovereign and a florin. Flushing nervously, Miss Archer glanced up into Nora's face, for the money was hers, and her first earning. But Nora had only said "Thank you" quietly, and turned to leave the shop, waiting for Miss Archer.

"Oh, Helen," she whispered, when they were out in the street again, "I am so thankful! Perhaps I shall not be a great burden upon you, after all. I shall make quantities of screens, and some slippers like those I worked for Mr. Doyle, and other pretty things; and that kind old gentleman will buy them all. Oh, Helen, isn't it a very good thing that the knowledge how to sew, and what colours blend well together, comes to us women by instinct?"

"Does it, indeed?" questioned Miss Archer, with a smile. "Now what do you intend to do with your wealth?"

"*My* wealth! echoed Nora, sadly. "Helen, if you won't let me work for my share, and take the share from me to spend wisely for us, I must go away; and—and I've nowhere to go really, Helen—nowhere."

"Just for this once," said Helen, gently, "let me ask you if you have not seen that there was some other—and pleasanter—course open to you. Do not think I wish to know your secret, Nora—so utterly I trust you, and so keenly I should feel any trouble of yours, that I would almost rather *not* know it—but, my dear, are there not others who could help you at this time?"

"No," replied Nora, very low and steadily. "No one but you, Helen. I have tried hard and earnestly to do the best for—for all, and I saw only this. I shall go out of their lives, and all—with them—will be as it was before. He could not take me without Dr. Armstrong too; he could not take me for myself alone, though I—was ready; and so he—he will not miss me."

"I do not understand," said Helen, in her gentle way; "but I can feel sure you will do what you think best. Nora."

"What I am most thankful of all for," observed the girl, simply, "is that I can earn money without teaching. We shall soon be very well off, Helen, and you shall go to the seaside. after all."

It was such a glimpse as this of the temperament that was sanguine—not from its lightness, but from its deeply-lying trust—which made so new a brightness now in Helen's life that she wondered sometimes (as she went to or from her duties, leaving Nora smiling at her own door, or looking for her waiting face at the window) how the old times of her utter solitude could have been borne. It was Nora's pleasant helpful companionship which brought a new lightness to Helen's step, even though it could not bring a new strength; and it was her sweet and unfailing sympathy which threw over Helen's great patience the bright colouring of real content.

CHAPTER XL.

Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran.

Atalanta in Calydon.

THUS week after week went by in the little terrace house, and only Nora's eyes, in their great love and compassion, saw the slow change in Helen. The girl broke now, unhesitatingly, the vow she had made never to go out alone. She would let neither Helen's injunctions nor her own fear keep her at home, and every afternoon Helen found her waiting in Highbury Crescent, and every morning she could part with her only in the same spot. Yet always there was the tea awaiting them, prettily laid, and something to tell, and to show; and, best of all, there was always in Helen's weariness that silence which only two dear friends can know, full of unuttered sympathy, of fixed immovable affection, and a deep, restful trust. Certainly there were often and often recurring hours in the long solitary days, when Nora's thoughts and fears and regrets grew almost too heavy and too sad to bear, and she had a hard and bitter struggle with herself; but Helen could only guess it was so, for no trace of this struggle was left to cast the faintest shadow upon her home-coming. With unfailing and most willing industry, Nora worked all this time—in the early mornings, through the hot and weary afternoons, and often late into the night; and, besides the fancy work she sold, she would lovingly work for Helen in her absence, making her simple dresses as pretty as she could; and never feeling happier than when she could bring an involuntary girlish smile to Helen's lips at some little dainty addition to her wardrobe, which she herself would never have thought of or ventured upon. But,

though once, in secret, she took in the seams of the well-worn dresses, they still, day by day, looked larger and looser on the wasting form; and when Helen now would smilingly give up one colour after another, saying they made her look so sallow, it was hard work indeed for Nora to hide the agony of fear upon her face. For the unerring foreshadowing of one dark truth lay ever in her heart, and it was its very certainty which made any allusion to it such torture.

Once or twice it happened that, when Nora—always accompanied by Helen—took back her work after dusk, the old man who had given her her first order—after his usual long, compassionate, inquisitive gaze—had paid her just a shilling or two more than Helen had guessed he would—for she was always careful to guess a little, that Nora's own hopefulness might not bring her disappointment. Then Nora had rejoiced as if another fortune had been discovered for her, and, with Irish improvidence, calculating this unexpected sum as inexhaustible, had devised a festivity or excursion, and entered into it heart and soul, carrying Helen with her in her pleasant enthusiasm, and recalling, with real laughter—though it might be akin to tears—those excursions they had planned in old times for holiday afternoons, when they had been governess and pupil. But Nora never recalled—as Helen always noticed—those later gaieties in such different localities, and in which she had taken so different a place and part.

So the time went on, while the days shortened rapidly, and the drear November fogs came with their deathly-clinging touch to the weak and suffering; and at last there dawned a morning when Helen sank back upon her pillows when she tried to rise, and only sobbed a pitiful assent when Nora said she must not teach *that* day.

"My dear, my dear, don't cry!" the girl pleaded, kneeling beside the bed, and laying Helen's wasted hand against her cheek. "It is so natural you should want a little rest. A day's rest will do you such good.

"What is it, Helen dear?" she whispered, presently, wondering at the feeble, unrestrained grief of the friend she had always known so patient and subdued.

"I may lose my engagement," sobbed Helen, her eyes growing eager, and great drops of moisture standing on her temples; and, Nora, that means poverty—for—us both. My love, don't look at me! I don't feel like myself to-day. How can I leave you? Oh, you don't know, my darling! You look so brave that I can see you do not know one half *my* fears. Some one must come and take you away. I will not have you here, Nora, to waste your youth and strength in care for me. Go away. Go away now, while I can bear it."

She had risen, and was appealing wildly, with her feverish

fingers looked ; while Nora grew very white and still in a new alarm.

"Go away, Nora ; I cannot work again. I shall be useless now, and a burden to anyone who is near me. I—I cannot even breathe without pain. Listen to this gasping. What are you to do ? How are you to bear it ? For a long time each cough of mine has been like a stab to you. And now—— Oh ! Nora, go back to those who can give you ease and pleasure ; for presently——soon——there will be—— Don't start from me ; I only wanted to whisper it——there will be *nothing* here, and I shall see you waste and fade as I am doing. I shall see you day by day losing your brightness and your beauty and your strength, until at last I—see no more. But you—but you, with the chill of death about you, would be faithful to the last, and your own life forfeited. Go away, Nora ! I have lost now my power of helping you, and I will not have you here to die with me. I *will* not—I—— Oh ! Nora, Nora !"

The cry which had broken the feverish words seemed to fill the quiet house ; but Nora had taken the sick woman's head upon her breast, and was whispering loving, cheering, tender words, and kissing the hot lips and brow and temples, and softly stroking the thin damp hair, and the wan cheek ; and smiling a little at the "nonsense" Helen had talked, and at the thought of there being any other spot where she could be as happy as she was just there.

"And," she said, in that pretty coaxing way of hers, "I am going to offer to teach your pupil, Helen, for the few days that you want rest. Do you think Mrs. Lovington will accept my very inferior services for that little time ?"

Helen's weak and unusual fit of excitement wore itself out in the restfulness of Nora's words and embrace ; yet still it was nearly an hour before Nora would venture to leave her. Helen had fallen asleep then ; and so, after putting near her hand everything she could think of, either to refresh or interest her when she awoke, Nora set off, with beating heart, to begin the task for which she had for many months fancied she was preparing herself ; but that was long ago—so very long ago !

The outside of the house in Highbury Crescent was quite as familiar to Nora as to Miss Archer ; but, when she had been taken into the drawing-room, and was waiting for Mrs. Lovington, she felt far more strange than she had felt during any one of those countless visits she had paid in the previous season, and she tried in vain to account for the feeling. When she had first entered the room, a gentleman had been strolling in the little conservatory which opened from it ; but as soon as he caught sight of her he advanced into the room and bowed.

Forgetting for the moment that Mrs. Lovington was a young widow with an only child, Nora took him for the master of the house, and at once explained her errand.

He was a young man—an officer in the Army, Nora thought—and he had looked negligent and light-hearted ; but he stood very still to listen to Nora, and it was evidently only by a great effort that he now and then turned his eyes from their curious questioning gaze upon her face.

He bowed in acknowledgment of her explanation, and then began to talk on other subjects—pleasantly, Nora thought, and very much as if he wished her to spend her waiting time agreeably. But it extended so long that at last she wondered aloud if Mrs. Lovington could think that she was in the schoolroom.

“I will go and see,” said her companion, rising with no particular willingness. Then Nora was left for quite another half-hour, before the lady of the house entered, with a chilly inclination of her head and a ceremonious greeting.

“Miss Archer—your sister, I presume—will probably be able to resume her duties in a few days,” she said ; “therefore you may inform her that my daughter shall have those few days as a holiday.”

“Thank you,” returned Nora, wondering why she seemed to excite as much curiosity in the lady of the house as in the gentleman ; “but, for fear Miss Archer should hasten back before she is strong enough to do so ; and that she may feel comfortable about her duties not being neglected ; and that you may feel so too ; may I not give my services to your daughter for the time ? ”

“Quite unnecessary, thanks,” was the chilly reply. “Is your anxiety to take her place caused by a fear that she will not recover ? I see,” she added, her keen eyes reading the answer in Nora’s sudden paleness. “Then I fear I must resign my claim upon Miss Archer’s time. It will be better for her to consider herself free, and it will be better for my daughter not to lose any time unnecessarily. Of course I must study *her* interests first. No, thank you. It is kind, of course, that you should offer your time for your sister ; but you are quite too young to have the charge of my daughter, and therefore I will not trouble you for particulars which are unnecessary. I never like to give needless trouble. Remember me to Miss Archer ; I will call some morning, and I shall trust to hear a good account of her. She should get away to the sea-side for a time.”

“Then you will not kindly allow me to take her place ? ” asked Nora, rising and making a brave effort to keep back her tears and plead once more. But it was in vain ; and in another moment she had her fingers on the handle of the door.

“Excuse me,” Mrs. Lovington said then, giving words at last to the curiosity which had taken such a hold upon her, “but where have I seen your face before ? I cannot be mistaken,” she added, pointedly, as she coldly and suspiciously watched the pink spots burn in Nora’s cheeks, “nor can my friend be mistaken, who chanced to see you here just now.”

"I have never seen you before that I know of," replied Nora, briefly.

"I am not deceived," the lady said, with a smile which would have been bland but for its stiffness. "Do you know Lord Keston?"

The few moments' pause was broken so easily and quietly that no one could have guessed the pain which Nora had to stifle before she could answer as she did—

"No, I have never met or spoken to a Lord Keston in my life."

"At that time," pursued Mrs. Lovington, uncompromisingly, "he was only Mr. Poynz. You remember him, do you not?"

"Mr. Mark Poynz? Yes, I met him in Ireland—a long time ago."

By this time Nora was out in the hall, and, passing by Mrs. Lovington's unconvinced and rather unpleasant smile, she coldly bowed, and left the house.

"Declined with thanks, eh?" queried the gentleman, who had watched Nora out of sight, when Mrs. Lovington joined him. "Did you consider it unsafe to have her about the house after my eulogium? I feared so when I saw you go to meet her with such stern determination in your face. You silly, jealous little mater! She was a perfect lady; and, had I been you, I would have given a triple salary, on the chance of my daughter growing like her teacher."

"You think of nothing but a pretty face," said the lady, with a smile; but she congratulated herself thoroughly now on having declined Nora's services in her house.

It was but a sad home-coming for Nora; but she spoke lightly of her defeat, and bravely argued in favour of fancy-work, sewing hard all the time, to finish what she wanted to take home that night.

"I have never cared so much for going to the shop since our old man sold his business to that child of earth with the golden hair," said Nora, talking apparently only to amuse Helen, as she sat and worked beside her; "but still I like the coming home always, and I shall like it best of all to-day, because you will be here. How often you have returned to me, Helen, but never yet have I come home to find you here alone!"

"Nor will you to-night," said Miss Archer, gently. "I am much better, and shall like the walk. You certainly shall not go without me, Nora."

Nora tried both entreaty and argument, but neither availed, so, after a very early tea—during which pleasant little meal Miss Archer looked so much better that the girl's heart grew light in her gratitude—they set out.

"I shall receive quite five shillings for the embroidery of this apron," said Nora, looking proudly down upon the parcel she

married, as they turned into Upper Street, so we will have the indulgence of a tram, Helen. No one could possibly miss eightpence out of five whole shillings."

"You see," observed Helen, her smile dying in a sigh, "how my weakness will exhaust our funds, and—and what help can I give now?"

"I would not like to be obliged to say what help you can *not* give now," returned Nora, lightly, as she looked "before and after" for the tramway car.

"How strange," she said, ten minutes afterwards, when they stopped at the spot which had grown so familiar to them both, "that the shop should be closed so early! I think that girl's husband is a very idle young man, don't you, Helen? I've often thought they only play at business."

"So have I—often heard it," Helen responded, her hand trembling a little on Nora's arm; for Disappointment was an old companion of hers, and she looked for his face when Nora had no thought even of his existence. "Will you ask next door if there is—anything the matter?"

"*Why are they closed next door?*" repeated the cheerful little watchmaker of whom Nora had asked this question, looking at her through the magnifying-glass which was fixed tightly in one eye. "Because they've failed—gone to the dogs—smashed up! What's the matter?" he added, presently, rising from his stool and approaching Helen, while he dropped the glass, and gave his features a good deal of free play as a rest after their tension.

"If they have, as you say, failed," said Nora, steadily and gravely, while she supported Helen in her sudden tremor, "do you think they will never pay any more for work that has been ordered?"

"Never a penny. They've bolted. Won't you sit down and rest?"

"No," whispered Miss Archer, clinging more feebly to Nora. "Let us go home."

"We will have a cab," said Nora, without the slightest hesitation, when she saw Helen's nervous distress on passing into the street. "We shall be at home in a few minutes then. My dear, lean on me while I look for one; the standing will be a little rest."

So they stood where they were, forgetting what a glare there was upon them from the shop behind: and they waited, looking anxiously and gravely at every passing vehicle, and saying no word to each other of this new disappointment.

At last Nora lifted her hand, for a hansom cab was being driven up to them.

"It is occupied," whispered Helen nervously, and hurriedly drawing Nora back, as she became aware of some one leaning forward from the cab to scrutinise them, and then turning sud-

denly to order the horse to be stopped. "It is some one who sees what we want——"

She had no need to finish her sentence or surmise. The cold proud whiteness of Nora's face, and the great fear, and yet greater daring, in her eyes, told Helen in a moment that Nora had recognised Dr. Armstrong even before he had stopped beside them.

CHAPTER XLI.

Little hand holding large hand pretty tight
For all its delicacy—eh, my lord?

ROBERT BROWNING.

STRENUOUSLY as Dr. Armstrong endeavoured to meet Nora without constraint, the effort was almost a failure. Though he advanced to her and Miss Archer with a smile and a hand-shake for each, they both saw plainly that from that moment nothing would escape his furtive watchfulness; and though he very quietly expressed his pleasure at seeing them, there was a strong and suppressed self-gratulation in every word and glance.

"He was charmed," he said, in his clear and suave tones, to meet Miss Archer again, after having lost sight of her for so long. Indeed it was a surprise to him even to have encountered his own cousin unexpectedly after her voluntarily absenting herself; she was, he felt quite sure, enjoying her visit to her old friend. Still, had it not been rather a merciless whim to try and keep her retreat a secret? But he had no right to complain. Nora had acted with a little girlish wilfulness, that was all—charming wilfulness, which refreshed him; for if everybody always did what everybody else always expected, life would be but what the poet called a draught of dull complacency, and he, for one, had no relish for such a draught. Had Miss Archer been looking for a cab when he had had the privilege of recognising her? He had unfortunately only had a hansom at his disposal, else he would have retained it at her service."

Very quiet and cold, Nora stood through this elaborate speech; but at its close she spoke, in just her own fearless way, intercepting any reply Miss Archer could have made; while she pressed a little closer to her side the trembling hand she held upon her arm, as if fear had no power to touch her now, except through Helen.

"I don't think a cab is necessary, after all, is it, Helen?" she asked. "We felt tired and idle just at that moment, but it is only a few minutes' walk to our station, and I am sure we need not mind—now that we have Dr. Armstrong's escort."

"*Dr. Armstrong!*" he whispered, deprecatingly. "How cruel! the formal address sounds from your dear lips, Nora."

But still he could not hide with what relief he turned to walk beside her, when they started up the Holloway Road.

"Miss Archer is very tired," said Nora, presently, addressing Nuel Armstrong with quiet indifference; but with no evidence of the shrinking repugnance she felt through all her frame, or of the fear which made even her lips so white, while she was sure he would not leave them; "for we came here to do a little shopping, and it is a good way from Kilburn, isn't it?"

The sudden feeble start which Helen gave, could not be seen by Dr. Armstrong as he walked on Nora's side up the lighted road; nor could he guess anything of that reassuring and caressing touch of Nora's upon her trembling hand.

"Kilburn!" he echoed, in astonishment, and even distrust. "Are you really staying there?"

"Didn't you know, all the time that I was at Great Cumberland Place, that Miss Archer lived at Kilburn?" inquired Nora, calmly, for she knew that he would go with them to their destination. "I think I often told you, and I used to fancy you had a good memory, Dr. Armstrong."

"So I have," he said, wincing again at her address. But Miss Foster assured me she had lost all trace of Miss Archer since you left."

"Very likely," said Nora, with quiet negligence; "and we have now lost all trace of Miss Foster. Never mind talking about her. How long a walk seems in a strange neighbourhood, doesn't it?"

"The station is not far," said Helen, beginning to breathe freely again, now that she could read Nora's intentions.

"But we may have to wait for a train," sighed Nora, just as if that were the greatest trouble the future could hold for her; "and as we didn't take return tickets to-day, we have fresh ones to buy."

"You shall have no further trouble about tickets or anything else, Nora," whispered Dr. Armstrong, looking into her face with the delight (as well as the consciousness of power) which he had tried so hard to subdue. "You are tired of these tasks you so thoughtlessly took upon yourself, and ready to relinquish them, I see. Lay them all upon me, my love; they are but trifles in my willing hands."

"What! Our tickets?" asked Nora; but her lips shook a little over the careless words.

"Helen," Nora whispered, very hurriedly, as they stood a few yards off, while Dr. Armstrong went up to the window of the booking-office at Islington station, "when we stop at Kilburn please guide us straight to your old lodgings, and don't let it be seen that the way is strange to me. Leave the rest to me. Oh, my dear, are you very tired?"

"Not at all," said Helen, below her breath; but smiling bravely,

and really not feeling so tired now in her fear as she had been in her great disappointment, nearly an hour before. "I understand. You will give me your arm, I know, as you always do, and I will lead you unobserved. Will he——"

But the sentence could not be finished, for Dr. Armstrong was taking up his change, and it would not do to risk another word. They had many minutes to wait for a train, and Islington station is not a cheerful spot to linger in, but still the minutes seemed to fly for Nuel Armstrong, as once more he sat beside the girl he had sought so long, and feasted his eyes upon the young face which, even in its paleness and its pride to-day, was beautiful to him beyond all other faces he had ever seen.

With a courage which took the place of strength, Helen Archer led the way from the Kilburn station along the Oxford Road: and Nora followed slowly, as if her idle talk with Nuel Armstrong held her back. When they reached the Randolph Road, Helen stopped, but she had turned into it before doing so.

"Think of my hurrying on, Nora," she said then, with a smile, "and leaving you to guide Dr. Armstrong. This is not a very brilliant thoroughfare, is it, Dr. Armstrong? But the houses are comfortable, and Nora and I have never given a thought to the street."

"Still," said Nuel, stealthily studying the locality "it is not a cheerful home for you, Miss Archer; and certainly not a fit one for Nora."

"What is fit for Helen is more than good enough for me," interposed Nora, hotly. "And we do not need anyone else to choose or decide for us, or interfere in any——"

Helen's quiet touch, as she slipped her hand again within Nora's arm, stopped the swift, disdainful words as if by magic; and Dr. Armstrong smiled, as much at their sudden cessation as at their meaning.

"My love," he said, in his exasperating suavity, "you will allow me, if you please, to be the best judge of what is fit for you, and of what you deserve. I have peculiar notions on that subject, perhaps, but I will carry them out at last, and your home shall be in the midst of all that is best and brightest. What! are you living *here*?"

Helen, with a warning touch, had stopped before a house, from no window of which did any light shine out; and Nora, with a little catching of her breath, answered him at once.

"Miss Archer is very tired, Dr. Armstrong, and you, as a physician, will understand how she must need rest after our excursion. So we will not ask you in to-night."

"To-morrow," he said, trying to stifle his eagerness, "I shall call, Nora. Miss Archer, will you give me your address?"

"This," said Helen, looking frankly up into his face, "is Randolph Road, and the number of this house is thirteen. Do you wish the name of the owner?"

"It might be better to——"

"Mrs. Evans," interrupted Helen, calmly. "Such a pleasant woman, too, and she was kind to me from the first day I came to live with her—two years ago."

He smiled and thanked her, taking her hand in farewell then, almost as impressively as he took Nora's. Had she not kept his darling quietly and safely through those terrible months, when his search had been so full of alarm? And would she not be obliged to resign her now to him?

Not the faintest doubt entered Dr. Armstrong's mind as to what Miss Archer had told him, yet it was his inherent suspicion, more than his courtesy, which made him stand to watch them, until the hall door had been opened, and they had coolly, and without a word, passed into the house, with the unmistakable air of being at home. And it was his caution, more than his care for them, that made him inquire from a passer-by the name of the road, and of the occupier of number thirteen. Then, smiling to himself over the impossibility of Nora escaping him again, he walked to and fro in that dismal street, through the fifty minutes which he had to spend waiting for a train to Euston.

"Nora," whispered Helen Archer—they were sitting in the dark little sitting-room which used to be Helen's, while the woman of the house went for a light—"speak, dear; speak to me. You don't know how terrible it was to know what this meeting was to you, and yet to hear you talk as if you had no fear or trouble, and to see your quiet, indifferent reception of Dr. Armstrong. Nora, how could you do it?"

But no answer came in words, for Nora's eyes were covered in the darkness, and she was seeking strength for what might follow.

"And," continued Helen, her breath failing her now, and her words broken by a fit of coughing which brought Nora to her side in a moment, "it was terrible even to me. I—I don't know what he has done, or wishes to do, Nora—I don't ask you, dear. But he told you of no one belonging to your old life; and—it made me tremble to see his power—his great power of keeping everything hidden. I never trusted him, Nora; and to-night, when I saw what he could hide—oh! my dear, he will trace us so easily now."

"Never," returned Nora, bravely; for just then the light fell upon Helen's flushed face, and turned every thought and fear into a longing to take her home and give her rest.

But a new trouble met them now. The woman who brought the light to them, and asked them politely (but rather significantly) what she could do for them, was not the Mrs. Evans whom Helen had known through her two years' occupation of this little sitting-room. No; Mrs. Evans had gone to her daughter for a week, the woman said, and she was minding her

house. The lodgings were let, and so she must trouble the ladies to leave as soon as they heard the bell. It was awkward calling so late, she added, with a glance of curiosity and distrust which made the hectic burn in Helen's cheeks, though Nora was not even aware of it, but of course Mrs. Evans might have understood it if she had been at home.

"May we sit in your kitchen for half an hour?" asked Nora, in her gentle, fearless way. "My friend is very tired, you see; but we will go then. Not yet, please," she added, earnestly; for it did not need Helen's glance to remind her that Dr. Armstrong might watch the house until the darkness had utterly settled upon the unfrequented road; "not quite yet, if you will kindly let us sit with you and rest. I know I have no right to ask you, but I hope you will not mind, and we will not disturb you in any way."

Though her suspicion was only half at rest, the woman led the way down a narrow basement staircase, and into a little kitchen, whose warmth and brightness gave poor Nora such a grateful sense of rest and relief, that the woman of the house literally laughed to see her childish revelling in the fire, and the sight of the safely-shuttered windows.

"Oh! Helen," she whispered, anxiously, "if this were but our own room at home! Hasn't this been a long day? And you have such a long, long drive to take. But, Helen," she added, quite cheerfully, as she saw Miss Archer's eyes fill with tears, "I can scarcely believe that it was only this very morning that I got nipped by Mrs. Lovington in Highbury Crescent, and only this evening that we found those fatal shutters raised between ourselves and affluence. My dear, will you lean your head on my shoulder and try to sleep?"

"If you'll give me the money," put in the woman of the house, after she had been standing opposite her visitors, staring from one face to the other, her curiosity roused as much by the beauty of the one as the weariness of the other, "I'll go and fetch a half-quartern of brandy. It'll do you good."

She had concluded the speech with a glance at Helen, but it was Nora who thanked her so eagerly.

"It is very good of you to think what will do her good. I would like you to get it so much, if it is not too much trouble. What will it cost, please?"

"Sixpence."

Suddenly, as Nora stood with her fingers on her pretty little purse, a great coldness seized her, and her heart sank like a stone. Was Helen's purse empty as hers, now while they were all these long miles from home; and Helen too weak to walk another step; and lighted streets and stations impossible for them?"

"I do not need the brandy," said Helen, gently, with her sad

and tired eyes on Nora's face ; "and—I think we must manage without the cab, Nora. I—I have only two sixpences here."

"Then give me one of them for the brandy," put in the woman, with rough good-nature, "and I'll go at once : for you're not fit to start anywhere as you are, and I'd be as sorry for your friend as for you, if I let you go this way. I should think you need a deal of care, and everything good that's to be got."

"Helen," whispered Nora—she had slipped to her knees beside Miss Archer's chair when they were left alone, and her lifted eyes were beautiful in their great compassion and tenderness—"I don't think our Father will let this night hurt you, because it is my fault that we are here ; and I have so prayed that I may do you no harm ; and—He always listens. My dear, we shall soon be home now, and you shall rest for days and days, for you have no teaching to-morrow. Oh ! isn't that good news ?"

Then Helen, keeping back the tears that could have flowed so readily in her weakness, took Nora's face between her hands, and kissed it very lovingly, though she could not speak. For what wonder that she had not quite Nora's trust and bravery, and could not recall the loss of her income as *good news* ?

"But we must walk home," she said, with touching pathos in the simple, impossible statement.

For a few minutes Nora did not answer ; then she rose to her feet, and, standing behind Helen's chair, looked down thoughtfully and intently upon the little hoop of pearls she wore on her right hand. By the time the woman had returned and given Miss Archer the brandy and water to sip, she had drawn it from her finger, knowing that it could never be returned to her, because, when they left this house—to which Nuel Armstrong had accompanied them—they must leave not the faintest clue to their further destination. Standing with her face hidden from Helen (because she knew how hard it would be to say it, and how grieved Helen would be to hear it), she begged the woman of the house to lend her ten shillings, and take her ring until she should bring the money back.

"What is the ring worth ?" asked the woman, bluntly, as she turned it round and round in her hand. "Perhaps nothing—only you wouldn't know."

"Yes, I know," said Nora, simply, "for I bought it. It was not a present to me. I paid twenty times ten shillings for it ; and if I do not come for it, you can sell it at any time for the same—I suppose. Now will you lend us the half sovereign ?"

Probably, if she had found she possessed the sum, the woman would have been willing now to give it ; but she could only find seven shillings, she told Nora, after her long absence from the room, and they must be satisfied with that, she supposed.

Satisfied they were, and even grateful for it, for would it not take them home ? Still they lingered, nervously afraid of ven-

turing too soon : and while they did so they sat at the kitchen fire with the woman of the house, and talked with her so pleasantly, and so thoroughly without pride and assumption, that, when at last they rose to go, she had forgotten all her suspicions and curiosity, and simply felt that her kitchen would feel extra solitary now.

"I shall fetch a cab, miss," she said, addressing Nora in the changed tone which had gradually grown upon her.

But Nora anxiously and courteously declined this, seeing that it might leave a clue for the morrow ; and then, with a kind good night and thanks, they went out into the street again.

"Isn't it nice and dark?" whispered Nora, with a reassuring pressure of Helen's hand—which, as usual, was within her arm—and that quiet bravery in her voice that Helen understood so well. "We shall soon meet a cab, I expect, when we leave this quiet road. I'm so glad I've seen it, Helen, because I used to have to fancy so much about your home in those old days. It was not exactly this I fancied ; it was a much more tumble-down sort of house. I was so Irish, you see, that I thought everyone who was not very, very rich, lived in a propped-up sort of old house, with gaps in the walls, and dogs peeping in through the gaps, and— 'There's a cab!'"

CHAPTER XLII.

All my days I'll go the softlier, sadlier,
For that dream's sake.

It was a long drive to Highbury, and Nora, sitting back in her corner, and turning from the light of the streets, took Helen's hand within her own, but would not speak, even to try to cheer her as she had done whilst walking, for silence would be a greater rest, she knew. But she herself was sadly ill at ease, and only seemed to breathe quite freely when at last they were within their own house, and had seen their landlady lock and bolt the outer door.

"Now I am content," she whispered to Helen, drawing her within her bed-room, and lighting the gas to look at her. "We have not been followed, and we are together alone again, and at home—Oh! Helen, just think what the world must seem to those who have no home!"

But Miss Archer's thoughts just then, like her eyes, could not travel beyond Nora herself. She had taken off both her own hat and jacket and Helen's, and now, in her long, soft serge dress (made so beautifully that no wonder Mrs. Prin always hurried with sighs to supply her with a wide apron when she went down into the kitchen to do anything for Helen), she was kneeling on

the hearth, lighting the fire in a scientific manner, which surprised Miss Archer even more than it amused her.

"I would like every London house to have a supply of real Irish turf," Nora said, as she dropped her hands to watch the burning of the wood. "Now don't tell me it makes a great dust. You English always say that. Don't you know that its dust will keep one turf alight for a whole night, ready to kindle the morning fire? I could have a fire in a minute or two then, without troubling any one."

"You are troubling no one but yourself now, dear."

"But I need not trouble even myself then, though I like lighting fires very much; I am used to it. Did I ever tell you how Will Foster and I lighted one or two once, when we went fishing? We took our dinner with us. He had pasties and cakes and cider, and I had two huge raw potatoes, which I intended to cook for myself, thinking, I daresay, that Will would cook the fish he caught—which he couldn't well do, because he caught none. As nobody was to know I was with him, we went a long, long way by the river; then we hunted among the trees for a retired spot to dine in, and at last, after wandering for hours and hours, we climbed some fences and reached one beautiful opening on the side of a slope. Here we lighted three fires."

"Why three?"

"Oh! you'll see in a minute. The first was just beginning to flame brilliantly, when a gust of wind took it bodily down the slope, and scattered it in countless flickering atoms. I collected all the remnants, and Will gathered more twigs; and as we had used our turf and paper (though fortunately not our matches) I lighted the next with my handkerchief. It was not a very successful plan, but the *handkerchief* at any rate burnt itself out well, and for a few minutes there was not a bad sort of a fire, though it was choking rather. Will didn't want a third lighted, but I did; so I lighted it with a bit of the brim of my hat, and it was splendid. Then he had to stop laughing, and congratulate me, and help me to cook my potatoes. The cruellest thing of all was that they were not half done when a man came and took us up for trespassing. My one remorseful reflection all the way he took us was, that we had not had our dinner earlier, that we might have had the enjoyment of it to remember in prison—for the man told me we were going straight to prison. How can you laugh, Helen? It was a real tragedy, and far worse for me than for Will, for when we were led handcuffed—well, hardly as you understand the word, perhaps, because your knowledge is only gleaned from books, but my hand tight in Will's—into an Awful Presence, my eyes ached so with their immense stare at it—and the smoke of those fires—that I knew it was Jupiter himself, as I had seen a picture of him on Olympus. It wasn't though, after all. The Awful Presence owned the land on which

we had been found forming a colony, and so when he advised me to wash my face, I did so at once in a tremor. Then he filled my pinafore with apples, and Will's hat with nuts, and sent us home in his gig to Kilver—Will had pretended we both lived at the Vicarage, because he was afraid of grandpa—and told us never again to wander so many miles away from home to trespass, and always to cook our potatoes before we started, unless we wanted to end our days at the treadmill—which we didn't. Laughing again, Helen? How can you? If we had been transported for seven years then, we shouldn't have been back yet—should we?—for I was quite thirteen."

"But Mr. Foster was grown up."

"Almost; but he never seemed to remember *that* when he came out with me. He is just the same still, I think. Now, Helen, for the nice little supper—I'll make you—both of us, I mean, dear, if you only won't look anxious about that—or anything, but just get into bed and rest. Leave me to put everything away. Isn't it my fault entirely that you are so wearied? I ought to have gone alone to-night."

"If you had," said Helen, with a deep-drawn breath, "I think the suspense of these hours without you would have killed me."

So utterly wearied was Helen, and so soothed by the supper Nora prepared, and by her very presence and voice, that she fell asleep almost as soon as she lay down. So Nora, dreading to disturb her, sat in the easy bedroom chair which she had herself bought for Helen, and rested there in utter silence—if such deep and anxious thought for Helen could be called rest at all.

It was about two hours past midnight, when Helen started from her pillows and called Nora with a cry of haste and pain.

"My dear, I am here beside you," the girl said, in the pretty, low voice that had grown so soothing and tender, "Were you dreaming?"

"Yes; dreaming, murmured Helen, as the short-lived feverish excitement died out of her eyes, and her breath grew quiet and equal again. "Nora, why were you sitting there—dressed and watching me? You forget yourself. You take no care for yourself. All your anxiety and care is for me. Oh! Nora, when I try to think—what you have been to me through these months, I—I——"

"You remember what you were to me last year," said Nora, gently, "that is all. Now, Helen," she added, with a soft kiss upon the hot lips, "I will read you to sleep again."

But words and voice, for the first time, had no power to soothe to sleep, and Nora laid down her book at last, finding Helen's tired, wakeful gaze fixed wistfully upon her face.

"Dreaming still?" she asked, smiling as she laid her hand softly on Helen's head.

"Nora," asked Miss Archer, betraying at once how far away her thoughts had been, "is Mr. Foster a member of any of the London clubs?"

"No, Helen. Why?"

"Is—Mr. Poynz?"

"Yes."

A little pause, while Helen tried to win ease and indifference into her voice.

"Which club is it?"

"The Carlton."

"And Mr. Poynz has a title now. He is Lord——"

"Lord Keston, yes." Nora had answered almost absently, because it was so rarely that she let her thoughts touch the time which Helen's words recalled; but the silence which followed her last answer struck her so strangely that she bent and whispered a question very low.

"Helen, why are you thinking of Mr. Poynz to-night?"

"I often think of him," Helen said, with a sudden nervous energy in her weak voice, and a deepening of the feverish red upon her cheeks. "I cannot help it, Nora. How could anyone who had known him help thinking of him? How, above all, anyone to whom he has been kind as he was to me—for whom he had shown such thought, and such real sympathy in those dull days? I could not help it that he gave me the only sympathy and pleasure I had—until I knew you. I could not help thinking of him then. I cannot help thinking of him now. Such thoughts hurt no one. They were very grateful ones even then, but they are doubly so now, in their deep and calm content. No, my darling, don't cry. Oh! how it breaks my heart to see you cry for me, when I never see you shed tears for all that you yourself have forfeited. My dear, I have given up nothing. I have more at this moment than I ever had before in all my life. As he grew to love you, he made *me*, too, his friend; that is all, my darling. There is no sorrow in the thought. Perhaps at first there may have been just a little, because we—we women are not created differently perhaps, even when no love is given to us from—one we can love, while we have—so much to give. I—I did not understand it then, but I do now. We may love all that is good, and true, and generous, and such love is good for us—not harm; and when we look back and see the light it has thrown upon our way—just for a little while—we know that it has helped us on to—the great light coming. He never knew, he never guessed," she whispered, as Nora, pressing her lips upon the wasted hand, tried in vain to stay her tears. "Long ago, Nora—so long ago—when I was a girl as you are, I had sweet impossible dreams even of my own, and thought that there might come a day when I should have some one to work for me and

care for me, and love the home he gave me—for my sake, just as I saw so many women loved and cared for. And perhaps, when this blessing never came to me, I—fretted a little to my own heart, and grew lonely and unthankful. Then his friendship did me good, and made me see—the better side—of all. And so I knew that what I felt for *him* would make me love everyone more, and I let it grow. Then you came. Nora, Nora, why cry for me in these past times, my darling? They are all dear memories to me now. You, knowing nothing of me, believed in me and trusted me. Hush! dear. If, as you say, you have not been deceived in me, you yourself prevented it. At once your love seemed to fill and warm my heart, Nora. I grew ashamed of its coldness then; I even forgot its craving, and felt I had a friend—not only whom I must love with all my heart, but one who loved me too. Did I not see it in every warm, kind glance and word, whether gay or earnest? And is it strange now, Nora, as I lie here and see all my life lying in the past, that you—and he—should be so often in my thoughts; and I long to see——”

“Oh! no—oh! no!” cried Norah, in real anguish, as she threw her arms round Helen. “Only me, Helen! My dear, my dear, only me! Let me do all! Oh! let me be all! And at last, when you meet him *There*, you will tell him that it was not in cruelty I kept him from you while I am here, but in love! Oh! Helen, Helen, in such deep undying and unchanging love!”

“Nora,” whispered Helen, the hectic burning brighter in her cheeks, and her eyes filled with saddest sympathy, “I guessed this. I am very, very grateful. Look up, my darling. I did not ask to see him; I want only you. Dear friend, true, faithful friend, I want only you. But I may feel that he will find a way himself—and now, God’s will be done.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

To worship truly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.

MAKING, each day, one melancholy, weary step, that dreary November month passed on. If the gloom and the fogs were but over, Nora thought, Helen might sit up a little, and perhaps would notice what was passing, and lose this far-off yearning look within her patient eyes. What could cause it? It could not now be caused by fear for Dr. Armstrong’s entrance, for many days ago they had ceased to look with dread for that. It could not be fear of poverty for them, Nora said, for Helen could see she had no use for the things which went so willingly to keep up the little household. And it could not be that she looked

for any other old friend or companion, because she had often said that had not Nora come in to her that day (when she had been, in her solitude, so gratefully and lovingly thinking of her), she must have been alone, both in health and suffering, all her life. What could it be? Night after night, as Nora sat beside the bed, her lovely watching eyes growing to look so large in her pale face, she would wonder over this. But she could not understand it yet.

All that nervous shrinking from the streets, which had seized Nora since their encountering Dr. Armstrong, was forgotten; for she never thought now of leaving the house. Day and night she was always with Helen; gently—ah, so gently!—smoothing the way for the tired feet into the valley path. She had given up both the other rooms now; not only because the two friends needed no room but this, where they could be together, but because Nora knew they could not pay for more. Still Helen's savings were not exhausted. One by one Nora's rings all went, but the slight white fingers were pretty enough without them; one by one, too, the luxuries Nora had bought for Helen's sitting-room were all given up; but who was there now to miss them?

Sometimes Helen would wistfully touch the plain dark dress with a look which told a pitiful story of its own, but Nora could easily smile at that now.

"Last time I was in London, Helen," she said one day, in her easy, pretty way, "I remember thinking how hard it would be to choose a dress—if I had been *obliged* to do so, you know, and I was so glad I wasn't obliged. Simply looking at them, in the shop windows, would have cured anyone, I think. I cured me. Oh, the hours of work and weariness they have seen, Helen! It wearied me even to look at them, and to think how unnecessary all the expense and elaboration was."

"But, my darling, you were always so fond of pretty dresses, only you know now that——"

"I am fond of them now," put in Nora, rather hurriedly; "I am indeed—just as I am fond of pictures. When you get up, Helen, I shall show you what I call a pretty dress."

"Mine?" asked Helen, with a smile. "Ah, Nora, I will let you forget to care for them when you are my age, dear."

"It isn't a question of age," said Nora, as she thought of many women she had met in society who considered themselves girls at Helen's age. "But do you know, Helen, I have sometimes really envied—just for the passing minute—women whose happiness can be complete just *because* they are handsomely dressed. It is such a convenient kind of happiness, isn't it?"

"And an enviable one?" questioned Helen, with the smile which Nora had been tempting. "I forget who it is," she added, thoughtfully, "but some writer says he can easily overlook any present momentary sorrow when he reflects that it is in his

power to be happy a thousand years hence. Such a thought as that is happiness indeed, for, if this life were all, oh, how weary we should be!"

It was a cheerless rainy night but the little fire in Helen's room burnt clearly and cheerfully, as usual, under the constant care it had. The doctor had just left the sick-room, and Helen had looked brighter since she had whispered a few parting words to him, while Nora was away for a minute. And now, with this faint brightness of patience and content upon her face, she lay with Nora's hand on hers, as she loved to feel it.

And the girl talked gently to her, wooing her into a little forgetfulness of her constant pain, as Nora sometimes could. Now mentioning grave and happy subjects, and now reminding Helen of pleasant days which they had spent together, recalling them in that tender, wondering way which after-sorrow teaches us. She would talk of their humble dissipations with delight, but she never touched on those gorgeous assemblies and entertainments in which she herself had taken part in the past season. She would smile over their rare excursions by rail or omnibus, but she said no word of her old luxurious drives, of her own ponies, or of that one last beautiful drive on the day Mark went away. She would talk of those little walks of theirs, after-lesson hours, in the lighted streets, when they were busy on their trifling housekeeping errands; but she never spoke of any of her old indulgent lavish purchases. She would recall the summer and autumn afternoons when Helen's home-coming was such happiness for her, and the tea such a pleasant, restful meal; but she never seemed to recollect her own beautiful house beside the river, and any home-coming there.

As she spoke, Helen fell quietly asleep, for the first time for many weary hours; and then Nora sat—in that great stillness which was growing so natural to her—and listened to the silence as well as the sounds, with the keen and nervous tension which watching gives us, when we so acutely feel (as if it struck upon our own brain) the vibration of every sound which may disturb the sleeper.

Thus the night had almost passed, when men's raised voices, angry and quarrelsome, seemed to fill the street, and even the house. Nora started to her feet, as if she could have silenced them by the agony of her own fear; and the hand that was not on Helen's went out imploringly, as if the voices *must* be still in pity to her mute, unseen appeal.

Then, looking down, she saw they ceased too late; for Helen's eyes were wide and startled, as if the sleep, which had stayed that wasting fire in her cheeks, and eased the laboured breath, had fled for ever at its rude awaking.

"Listen!"

The faint voice was so clear and calm, so unmoved by any confusion which, from without, had reached the sad little chamber, that Nora, in a new fear which stayed her very breath upon her lips, knelt down and looked into the eyes whose gaze was so far off.

"Helen!—Helen!" she whispered, in untold love and longing, "I am here beside you."

Ay! There beside her, with all the warm and tender love which had made the sunshine of poor Helen's life, and with the gentle, fond caresses which had always soothed and cheered her—until now.

There beside her, but unnoticed for the first time; while over the patient face, and in the far-off, dying eyes, there broke a smile of greeting.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds.

Shakespeare's Sonnets.

THE brown monotony of the bog was made dreary indeed by the steady downpour of autumn rain; yet old Kitty stood looking out upon it from the kitchen window at Traveere, when she might have looked into the turf fire, glowing frankly and cheerily in the open grate behind her. It was that quiet hour of the afternoon when the day's active work is done, and it is too near tea-time to begin evening tasks. The kettle hung over the fire, ready for Kitty's solitary tea; but no cup and saucer were set, and the thin cake of oaten meal, tilted before the fire on an iron tray, was burning slowly, as no good Irish housekeeper can bear to see her "meal-cake" burn. But then truly Kitty did not see it, for her eyes—dimmed now by something more than age—saw only the wet, brown scene beyond the little blurred panes of the new window.

"Rainin', rainin'; iver an' alwis rainin'!" she muttered, rubbing one spot in the glass angrily with her closed fist. "Long afore wan power's o'er the nixt begins. It 'ud be this wither they'll be havin' in Purgory, I'm bound, power sows, wid niver a dthry clo' to put on too. An' the bairn mebbe out in the cowl an' wit, an' wid the face of hurr that whitesome, loike a new-led egg; yit, furr the purthisomeness of hurr, it's in a goulden char't she mit be ridin', an' a will-to-do husban' arm in arm wid her, no fiss. Howly Sint Pathrick! now who be's comin' here the day?"

For a moment the old woman's face had lighted up with expectation, as she pressed it to the glass; but in the next she had recognised the small, well-cloaked figure under the dripping umbrella.

"An' sorra a wan ilse," she muttered, as she opened the door to Miss Pennington.

"No—no news," said Celia, in haste to say it as soon as she met Kitty. "No news; but one cannot always stay in the house, even in such weather as this. So I came to ask you how you are. Mr. Foster is talking with Breen, and will come in for me presently. What a nice fire!"

"An' much usesomeness it be's to kape a dacent bit o' fire now at all," grumbled Kitty, as she took Celia's cloak from her, "an' that bairn niver to set hurr fit back on the sod o' ould Ireland agin at all to see it! It's aisy enough to starve in thim places beyant the say; an' it's starrvin' she'll be the day, an' wit as a wave, glory to God!"

"Are you better yourself, Kitty?" inquired Celia, in her sedate, thoughtful way; but flinching a little from that other subject.

"I be's will enough in meself, Miss Pinnington; it be's me fit achin' frum the standin' of me, lookin' out an' niver seein' that blissed cheeld. 'Dade, on this day they be achin' but sharp-somely that I don't know I've anny fit on me at all."

"Then papa's recipe didn't cure your feet, Kitty?"

"Oh, the resate!" returned Kitty, with a prompt and generous air of exoneration of all blame from the sender of it, "is will enough. It cured 'em quoite a good deal, me dear! but still"—honestly—"not much, at all. Now, ye must sit here a bit, sure, whither the gintleman comes furr ye or not. It'll be weeks, an' days, an' hours sin ye iver be here agin, mebbe."

"Yes, we go to-morrow." Celia was sitting beside the fire gazing into it; and did not raise her eyes to meet Kitty's shrewd, pleased glance.

"An' ye'll some o' ye foind me bairn this toime?"

"I wish—oh, how I wish we could!"

"Ye're missin' hurr yerself," remarked Kitty, looking down upon the girl's grave face and listless attitude. "I've noticed it iver sin' ye come back—all of ye, too. Folks wonder over it now an' thin, sayin' sich nonsinse 'bout Miss Nora bein' ongratylful to ye! *She*, that 'ud nurse up a broken ligged cat, loike its own mither; an' it's meself that's sin her do it."

"Does anyone say she is ungrateful, Kitty?" asked Celia, looking up in surprise. "I never heard any one here utter a word against Nora, even through all this mystery of her disappearance."

"Thin ye wurr locky," observed Kitty, briefly; "an' it wurmt anny o' the docthor's frinds ye've bin discoorsin'."

"No; I don't want ever to talk to any of Dr. Armstrong's friends again."

"Ye haven't hurrd o' him yit, I s'pose?" inquired Kitty, presently; evidently speaking against her will, as she put aside her burnt cake. "What wurr the last ye hurrd?"

"I have never seen him," said Celia, speaking heavily, "since the night we—lost Nora. But afterwards, you know, when Mr. Poynz had at last tracked out that house, to which Hannah had driven with Nora on the Saturday before she went away—Mr. Poynz, when he came back, kept Hannah for the service, you know, and I think they must have gone all over London to seek that house—they found that a gentleman had taken the room only that very morning, calling himself Harris, and had never returned after the lady (that was Nora) had driven away with her maid. Mr. Poynz suspected how it was, and took the mistress of the house (who had let the room to this Mr. Harris) with him until he could show Dr. Armstrong to her; and—yes, *he* was the Mr. Harris who had engaged the apartments, and he was the only gentleman who had been to the house at all. Since then I have never seen Dr. Armstrong."

"But sure the English gentleman towld him this?"

"Yes," said Celia, very low. "I believe—I have heard that there was a terrible scene between them; but what could be done? As he said (Dr. Armstrong, I mean) Nora had left us of her own accord, and our letters proved it. He had not seen her since she had driven from him with her maid, after a business interview, he said, which she had chosen to conduct in private at his lodgings, to which she had voluntarily come. And he had no intention at all of explaining more fully. No one could make him do so, you know, and so——We know nothing still, whether he does or not."

"Ye moight will say ye hadn't annythin frish to tell me," grumbled Kitty, throwing a turf into the hollow of the fire. "Sure, I've hurr'd all this afore. Misther Dyle towld me that, 'an mower, no liss. But its moighty little, me dear. Whurr's the rason of hurr goin' at all at all?"

"Ah, where indeed?" sighed Celia, despondingly. "Even Mr. Doyle can make no guess. She wrote to him, as you know, and resigned her wealth; because, according to a letter of her grandfather's she had forfeited it. But Mr. Doyle says she could not have known she was obliged to relinquish it if Dr. Armstrong had not told her; and he says that looks suspicious. And so he is keeping the money in his own hands, until he has positive proof that she has lost her right to it."

"An' whoile he's kapin' it, she's nawn to spind on hurrself, poor widgeon; an' she's all throughother thurr in England, I'll warnt. She wurr fit furr it when she wint away from here—she'd niver had anny, an' she didn't want it—but ye spyled hurr afore ye left hurr 'thout mawny over thurr. An' here I've mawny, an' the bit an' sup in plinty, an' can't sind hurr nuthin'."

"How willingly we would any of us send to her if we could," said Celia, earnestly.

"It's quoite, quoite sure y'are," said Kitty, taking a worn letter

from the bosom of her dress, "that thur's no place written here fur us to sind hurr"

This was an old familiar speech of Kitty's now, and Celia never came to Traveere without being prepared for it; but there was no evidence of this being the fifteenth time she had read the letter slowly over to the old woman, who sat close to her, leaning forward and devouring each of Nora's few loving, sorrowful words of good-bye, as they fell a little brokenly from Celia's lips.

"Thur's nuthin' she's furgotten in it," said Kitty, rubbing her sleeve clumsily across her eyes, as she put the worn paper back, with hard, brown fingers, which yet were delicate and careful then, "ivery animal's in hurr head, ye see, an' Breen, an'——"

"Kitty," put in Celia, very glad to interrupt the heavy, unusual sobs, "I hear Mr. Foster's step. Will you open the door to him?"

"I'll open the dower," muttered Kitty, as she rose, "but if he be's loike he wurr last toime he come I'll not know him if he be's thurr his viry silf at all. An' thur's Breen, too, comin' up after him," the old woman went on, as she passed the window. "He's iver an' alwis 'truddin' 'bout in here now. *Cheerin' me*, he calls it, the big idget, whin I be's so cheerifle, mirover."

Will Foster lingered for many minutes beside Kitty's fire, evidently detained by the motive which in Breen had excited her contempt; then Celia had found that the rain had abated, and so donned her waterproof and told Will she was ready.

They had walked quite half-way across the bog before Will Foster volunteered a word to his companion; but she was growing used now to these uncharacteristic moods of silent depression, which broke the restless excitement in which he had lived ever since Nora's disappearance. Constantly was he forming a new plan, or projecting a fresh journey, and when either had failed, or been relinquished in its design, he would subside into utter and speechless despondency—for a few hours.

"I seem to have been here doing nothing for years," he said, at last, startling Celia by his unceremonious rupture of the silence. "How long is it since I came, Celia?"

"Not two days," she answered, in her gentle way. "And you would not have been doing nothing, if there had been anything you could do—I know that, Will."

"You always think the best of me," he said, his inherent and pleasant politeness toning down his excitement a little, as it always could. "And it is no wonder I came, is it?" I'm sure when I heard, on Sunday morning, that Mrs. Pennington had decided to go to Brighton for a change, and to take you, I determined at once to come and fetch her—and you; and I could hardly get through my service, I was so glad. But then," added poor Will, frankly, "you see it is a long time since I've been able to get through a service quite properly, without letting my

thoughts wander to disappointments and troubles, and doubts as to what it would be best to do next. Do you know, Celia, on the first Sunday of all, I began to perform the service in my great coat."

"Mother wants a change sadly; don't you think so?" asked Celia, after a little pause—for she had so often received these confidences of Will's. "We all are very anxious about her, but papa says Brighton air thoroughly renovated her once before—after my little brother died, but I don't remember that. It seems a long way for us to go, but I fancy the very consciousness of being in England will soothe mamma. She has fretted terribly since we left London."

"And you yourself, Celia?" inquired young Foster, understanding all she shrank from saying. "Are you glad to go?"

"Yes. In England I shall not seem so very far away from Nora—I believe not, at least—for I think she is there. And, besides the benefit for mamma, I shall hear what you are doing, without such a long delay. And when you have news, I shall know it at once."

"My mother is in Brighton now," said Will, utterly unaware of the flitting blushes on Celia's sad little face, "and I shall be there very often. You don't know, Celia, how delighted I am to think of seeing you whenever I go—of course chiefly because you need the change, but a good deal for my own sake, too. I have no one now to discuss my plans with, and to help me with suggestions for my search. As for Poynz, he is quite changed, and when I *do* manage to see him for a few minutes, I somehow—there's something about him that stops my worrying him with any proposals or fears (or even hopes) of mine."

"You mean because he has done everything that could be done?" asked Celia, in her gentle, practical way. "Advertised, and employed detectives, and searched, and examined, and made all the efforts you and Mr. Doyle have told us of?"

"I did not exactly mean that," explained Will, honestly. "I meant because in the presence of his pain and suspense, anyone else's—however great and hard to bear—must seem less; and anyone else's grief would seem like an intrusion in presence of his immense, silent agony. Oh! Celia, the last time I saw him, do you know I felt afraid to be alone with him? It sounds absurd, I know, but it is the simple truth; for I thought, when I looked at his face, that this great suffering, about which he is so silent, was too much for any man to bear, and that it would kill him."

"Does he look so ill?" questioned Celia, sorrowfully.

"I don't know that that is it exactly, but he looks quite changed—locked up in himself, as it were, and stern—even fierce, I think. Yet sometimes a longing comes into his eyes, as gentle and wistful as a girl's."

"And he never rests in this sad search, I suppose?"

"Never; he is always pursuing it, and with a system, too, as I never can. Yet often even when he is forming or following some intricate plan, his thoughts seem suddenly to go off far beyond his control. I sometimes see that they are miles away from me while I am speaking to him."

"That is not at all like what he used to be," said Celia. "I remember he was always, in his coolest moments, so quick to enter into whatever was told or asked him."

"And somehow, with it all, he seems to be that still," the young curate went on, reflectively. "It was only yesterday—he had come down to Heaton for one night, and was walking with me past the church—he talked to me most kindly about my own prospects, and he told me—it was a strange thing to tell me, Celia, but I don't think it will be any betrayal of trust to repeat it to you—he told me rather a strange intention of his about the Heaton living. He said he had always intended it for me, but now he had changed his mind, and he had perfect confidence in my not resenting the change. If *you* married a clergyman, he said, the Heaton living was to be a gift for your husband, for Nora's sake, whose friend you were—you are, I mean. He says he feels sure you will marry a clergyman eventually, because you are so exactly what a young rector's wife should be—so he said."

"Oh, Will, I hope he will not think of that. I hope he will give it to you," faltered Celia, her face burning hotly.

"No, he will not, and he is quite right," young Foster answered, generously, "His decision is best. But then it is only to be so, I should fancy, if he marries Nora. He says his decision is selfish, because it is to please Nora, by settling her dear little friend near her; but that could not be the case if she does not marry him."

"He will never marry any one else," said Celia, with the quietness of utter conviction.

"Do you feel so sure? But you know that they are not really engaged, don't you Celia—don't you?"

"Why need you think of that?" asked Celia, gently. "Nothing seems to matter to me now, except the finding of Nora."

"Yet more seems to matter terribly to me," said Will, in his frank, prompt way, "and I cannot even yet look at the possibility of her marrying some one else. Oh, Celia, if I could but find her!"

"Celia," he asked, presently, with one of his swift changes of mood, "shall you be ready to leave to-morrow?"

"Yes, we are all ready now."

"How delightful it will be to have you! And Celia," he added, trying in his simple kindness to cheer her a little, "when you marry the lucky parson who is to have the Heaton Rectory

won't you try to persuade him to retain me as his curate? If Nora " (with a little gulp) "is to miss you so immensely in that splendid home of Keston's, just think how solitary I shall feel, losing her, *and you, and my old parish.*"

"I shall never marry at all, Will."

"My dear girl," he said, in his genial, brotherly way, "such a notion carries absurdity written on the face of it. You will marry, of course; and marry a clergyman too, I hope, for Nora's sake as well as yours—and his. There, that wish surely ought to have double weight from me, because, if you don't wed the parson, I—personally—shall reap the benefit."

"How?"

"In that case Keston intends to give me the living."

"If I don't marry?"

"If you don't marry a parson."

"Put down the umbrella. Will; you hold it so low I can scarcely breathe."

CHAPTER XLV

Then, when we stood in the chamber, and knew not the words we were saying.

UTTER solitude had never held such silence and loneliness for Nora as that which wrapped her as she sat beside the dead; in that little room which had been home to her for so long, and in which it was so sadly strange to sit with motionless hands and silent lips; after those constant tasks and that constant companionship of the time which was gone for ever now. Could it really have been that sometimes she had felt lonely, even through those days and nights when Helen lay here, needing her, and loving her? Ah! could it be possible? In her isolation now, and in that terrible hush of sorrow and loneliness, Nora could only look back longingly to those times, dreamily and vaguely envying her old self, because there had been life and sound about her then, and a warm and living glance had met hers.

But now the room was filled with cold, and awe, and silence; and, chilled and bewildered, Nora sat in this new loneliness, wondering—when any stray sound reached her from the street or from the house—how it *could* be that other lives were passing as usual; that duties were being performed, and pleasures taken, just as if the world were still what it was long ago—when she remembered having duties to perform and pleasures to enjoy, even herself. But, then, it was so long ago, and the world was so different. This whole world was filled with gloom, and a great awful stillness. What could it mean, when these passing voices broke it, as if they could not know of this dreamy white-

ness which covered the still features and the dead smile! As if they did not know that it was all over now—that life was gone, and only death was left.

With her tired hands clasped in her lap, but her head raised in the intensity of these new feverish thoughts which swayed her without will of hers—as thoughts often do in such keen anguish—Nora sat as she had done through all the thirty hours since Helen's death. Now and then the mistress of the house, who had learned to love the girl through her long untiring, and uncomplaining attendance on Miss Archer, came softly into the room and tried to tempt her away. She had put a nice little fire in the sitting-room, she said, because her lodger was out, and this chamber was cold as a well. Would not a little breakfast do her good? "My dear," she said at last, roused to real terror by Nora's changed voice when she thanked her, and by that wild, bewildered gaze of the dark, puzzled eyes, "if you go on like this, we shall soon have you lying there too. I'm sure nobody would know you as it is, and I shall have this laid at my door."

"I will come," said Nora, rising wearily when Mrs. Prin pleaded so, in the morning of this second day; "I will take what you give me. You have been very kind to us both; I will not bring you more trouble if I can help it."

Then Mrs. Prin started forward in a hurry, hearing that tired sob. But Nora's eyes were still quite dry in their pained perplexity, and she only said she had a headache—rather a giddy headache—when the woman questioned her so anxiously.

"I don't think I will go away from here," she said, sinking back upon her seat. "The room moves with me when I move. I am better here. Don't you know how soon they will take her from me, and then I can never come back to her. No; let me stay now."

So Mrs. Prin left her once more, in that great stillness of pain and bewilderment; and when, an hour afterwards (with a sensation of hope and excitement which was strange to her) she opened the folding doors between this room and the sitting-room, she found Nora still sitting motionless beside the cold, covered face which could not brighten now to meet the yearning, clinging gaze.

"Miss Archer," she said, softly—for Helen had let it be believed here that they were sisters—"will you come here? This room is at your service, and you are wanted."

Nora had been summoned to more than one hard and bitter conference through these two days; and now she rose almost mechanically, and almost as if in a dream, to meet one more.

"I have such a strange headache," she said, wearily, as she came towards the open doors, with her hand upon her forehead. "I never remember my head aching so before—perhaps because I am not used to——"

The words died on her white unsteady lips, and she staggered a little as she stood ; for she had seen the familiar figure of her landlady retire, and some one else come towards her—some one whom in that first moment she scarcely knew, yet whose approach made her heart throb with pain, and her limbs lose their failing strength.

“Nora, Nora, my beloved !”

Such a call it was, from heart to heart, though the words were but a whisper, as Mark took her in his arms, and held her as if he never again could let her go. And yet so gently, too ; for this fragile girl was not the happy, wilful girl whom he had left in such health and beauty, on that happy summer day when he had told her how he loved her. Was *this* the gay, bewitching beauty of the past season—the girl even in whose *presence* sorrow seemed to break into singing, and no face could wear this pain !

Ah, it was well that Mark should lay her head upon his breast while these thoughts passed like arrows through his heart ; for even *her* anguish must have grown and deepened if she could have looked on his.

“Oh, child—oh, love !” he whispered, from his full heart. “How I have sought you ! But that misery is all past now. You are here within my arms—safe at last—my own, and in my care for ever.”

At first his words had not seemed to reach her, but now she lifted her head and moved gently from him, holding the foot-rail of the bed for support, as she turned and looked down upon the still form lying there.

“I have no other room,” she said then, very low. “Please leave me—with her. It has been so silent here, and your voice is—full of trouble.”

For a few minutes he stood beside her, looking down wonderingly and tenderly, as she did, on the motionless figure to which, when he had seen it last, Nora had hastened with such loving eagerness.

“For her,” he whispered, “the rest has come now, Nora.” And at his words—the first she had heard tenderly spoken of Helen—the long-frozen tears found vent, and, bowing her head upon her hands, she sobbed as if her heart were breaking in its anguish.

Quietly and tenderly he soothed her, leading her the while into the little unoccupied sitting-room which she and Helen used to call their own ; and at last the sobs grew faint and far between, and she looked up to meet Mark's gaze of love and sorrow. Then, all at once, remembrance came back. She rose from the seat into which he had put her, and stood quite still beside the little fire, leaning with her clasped hands on the chimney-piece, and looking down among the glowing coals, with a very fever in her sorrowful dark eyes.

"I have a headache," she said, moving one hand slowly to the back of her head, and then clasping both again; "and it made me bewildered at first. I hardly knew—what I was doing, or who—you were. Now, I remember. I"—with one swift glance at the closed doors—"would like to go back. I feel stronger there, I think. She understands, and you—never can."

"I understand," he said, and could not help the tone betraying that concentrated passion whose power frightened even himself now in her presence. "I understand, but I will let that rest until I meet him. Now I can only feel how I have found you, my love, my treasure—to be guarded now and cherished with such care—such care, my poor, pale love——"

"Mark!" The whisper was full of a new, acute pain, for his words had been broken by a sob, terrible to hear from him in his strength. "Mark, are *you*—have you been suffering, too?"

"Suffering!" He echoed the word, meeting her gaze; and then she saw the havoc these months had made in the brave, steadfast face. "But I am not going to tell you of that, Nora. I have found you now, and suffering is over for us both, my beloved."

"You have been ill," she said, low and drearily; while she stood opposite him, with her sad eyes cleaving to his face.

"If I had been ill ever since we parted, Nora, this would be recovery—to hold your hand in mine, my sweet, and know that no power on earth can part us."

"I remember," she said, looking slowly and timidly around her. "It was not here we parted. I remember. They told us that to-morrow a new scene of things might open, and it did. It was all different then. I tried not to think of you. Helen guessed how I tried, for I saw how sorry she was for me. She knew it was hard. But she was—always good. So patient, that I—tried to be patient too. Oh, Mark!"—with a sudden shivering terror—"why did you come? I have so prayed that, whoever found me, *you* never should. I am not strong—with you. I am afraid—of myself. And—and—oh, how dreary the loneliness will be—after!"

"There is nothing to come after, Nora," he gently said, "except a happy life for us two together. All separation is over now, my sweet. I will not to-day ask you why you imposed it upon me, or rather allowed another to do so, for this day I have no word to say except in gratitude for our re-union. Now I will see that kind doctor who, at Miss Archer's dying request, sent me your address. Then will you be ready to come, my darling?"

"Ready—to come!"

She repeated the words vaguely and dreamily, but their very utterance brought back all the knowledge which his sudden presence had scattered.

"I cannot come," she said, her tones very quiet in the intensity

of her emotion. "I was afraid you would find me because you did once before. But it was so different then, I was so glad you found me, oh! so glad!—now it had been my one great fear."

Standing there, in her plain dark dress, and with her beautiful hair all knotted loosely from her face, as if its weight had troubled her, she was so unlike the merry Nora of old times, that it was little wonder Mark felt the words unlike her too, as he drew her to him with such compassionate and protecting gentleness.

"My love, how soon can you be ready to come? That is all I want to know. I can only afford to be away from you for a very few minutes."

"I cannot come—even to you. Oh! Mark, in pity do not ask me."

"I do not ask you," he said, the lines deepening in his rugged face, as he tried to hide the fear for her which made his voice so unsteady, "I only wait to take you. I can go to the doctor another time. I need not leave here, even for a few minutes, without you. I feel as if I could never let you leave my sight again, my beloved."

"I cannot go, Mark. You must leave me," she cried, in a tone which he had never heard before, through all his knowledge of her. "I have a promise to keep—a vow. Mark, you are true and honourable, you cannot tempt me—to break it."

"Truth and honour!" he repeated, wrathfully, as, looking on the young face, beautiful even in the whiteness of great pain, he recalled the radiant smile and happy glance which had belonged to it. "Truth and honour had no place in the compelling of such promise; and by Heaven——"

"Oh! hush!" she cried, pointing with both her clasped hands to the closed doors between them and the dead.

"Nora," he whispered, catching the weak, raised fingers in his own, and trying, for her sake, to restrain his great agitation, "all promises that stand between yourself and me must be broken, for the sake of that very truth and honour of which you remind me. When you speak of another promise, do you forget that our first was given to each other, and that it made us husband and wife in the sight of Heaven? Would you not hold *that* promise sacred, Nora?"

"I do," she said. "All my life will be better for that promise, though it can only be kept in my own heart."

"Nora," he cried, passionately, "you know how I love you—life and love seem one to me; I could not disentangle them with all my strength; even you, who have all other power over me, could not tear these two apart from me—and you love me too. Can I read you so truly, sweet, and not know that you would love me ever, just as you did when you made me that promise which you must keep before all others?"

"Not before this, for the secret is—not mine. Oh, Mark, do

pitiful! Would you, who love me, be the one to tempt me to forget my truth and pity?"

"No, I would make you remember them," he said, growing stern in his agony. "What other man has any right to wring a promise from you? What man on earth has any right to steal my wife's confidence and peace, as well as her trust in me? Do you think I do not know who has done it, Nora? And he shall answer this with his life, for he has done worse to me than to take my own——"

His hot, passionate words died under her sad gaze. What but caressing gentleness could live in the presence of her great, quiet sorrow?

"My love," he whispered, "give me that burden which is killing you. Who, except myself, should bear anything for you? I will not ask you now to tell me the secret whose keeping is so hard. When you have rested, sweet, and we have wooed the old brilliance back to these sad eyes, and the soft rose-tint to the white cheeks; then you will see that my hands and heart are strong; and you will lay your burden there—the last which you shall ever bear alone, my cherished one."

"I dare not," she said, gently drawing back from his caresses. "I never can be your—your—I never can be—anything to you again. I—— Oh, my head aches so!"

"You want rest, my love, and I will give it you. You shall have old friends and dear faces about you, as well as my constant care, and love and cherishing."

"Mark," she said, in the soft hushed tones which she had used throughout, but with a new weary steadfastness, "you said you would bear a burden for my sake. I am giving it to you now. It is cruel to do so, but I would not if I could help it. I never appealed to you before as I do now. I never entreated you before as I do now. Oh! Mark, the burden that I have to give you is—to leave me here alone."

For a few moments it seemed as if his passion rose beyond control, and, with rapid nervous fingers, raised involuntarily to his throat, he grasped his collar there, as if it choked him. But one gentle, pleading touch of hers upon his arm, melted the strong passion back again into the infinite tenderness from which it had sprung; and, remembering her weakness while he read the strength of her resolve, he took her hands once more within his own, and even smiled while he told her they would talk of this another time.

"Even to you," she said, for she had seen this strong brief struggle, "I have brought only trouble. But you will forget it in time. I hope so, Mark; only—it is so hard to forget, isn't it? I have so often—oh, so often and often—tried, and yet memory grows stronger every day, instead of weaker; and those old days come back and haunt me as well as—the pain."

of—these. That is what makes my head ache so. But when I rest, like Helen—What is it?" she whispered, slowly, moving again from him, and pressing the back of her head with her hand, as he tried to stay her pitiful words. "Did I say what you did not like? I forget. If you knew—if you could feel just for one moment this pain—in my head, you—would understand."

"My darling, I can understand. Do I not feel every pain that hurts you? But you shall soon win back the old health, and the old bright spirits too, my own beloved. In a few minutes," he added, changing his tone with an effort, "we must start. I shall bring a carriage, Nora, darling, in which you can know no fatigue; and you will meet an old kind friend, who will nurse you for me, until I can take you abroad—my own for ever."

"It is—impossible."

She was shrinking from his very gaze now, and leaning for real support against the chimney-piece.

"It is impossible. I shall stay with Helen. She was so good to me; so patient with me; and I must not see them again, or—listen to you. Oh, Mark! if you really love me, leave me here, I—can bear it here."

"You would bear anything which you thought just," said Mark, with intense earnestness; but *I* am to judge for you now. If *you* can have forgotten that you belonged to me, my darling, *I* am not likely to forget it too; and even your entreaties (though it breaks my heart to refuse them) cannot move me in this. I will do what I feel best for you, my precious child. It is all in selfishness, I know; but you will forgive the selfishness, for what would my life be to me without you—who saved that life for me. Nora, my own beloved, do you not know that to speak of our ever parting again is simply madness?"

"Madness?" she questioned, looking into his face almost wildly, as her great courage fought with her great longing for his help and protection. "I have thought that before. I have thought sometimes that perhaps it was—*that*. And I thought it might be better so, because I should not know—What made you start? It is strange to see you start, Mark. Did I vex you? I never used to vex you. I always, always knew *you* were not worried by things I said, even when others were, long ago. I never was afraid of saying to you *whatever* was in my thoughts. It always seemed different talking to you—and to others. I—don't know why."

"My darling, my own darling!" he whispered, low and brokenly; but could say no other word.

"But I think that then, when you started, I must have been talking to myself. I did it one day—to-day I think it was—and it frightened me. It was in there, and the room was so quiet, till—till I turned and spoke to Helen—quite aloud—and laughing, too, I think. But she—she never turned to me, or smiled, or—"

Oh, take me in to her again! It is still and peaceful there, and she stops this pain—a little."

"I will take care of Helen," he whispered, his chest heaving in a new fear, "and you shall come back to her. But I must take you now."

"Mark," she said, her low words less broken, while he soothed her with such tenderness, "I am not going. I cannot go. You will leave me, please. Perhaps when you are gone, and I sit quite still again—quite, quite still—my headache will be better. You have had headaches, haven't you? I have had them sometimes, but I never noticed before how hard it was to remember exactly, and to say what I must say, and to—to pain you. If the pain were gone I could say it better perhaps. That we two must never meet again—never—or, if we do, it must be like—other strangers. Oh, Mark, make it easier."

"All right, my sweet," he said, folding his arms about her, and losing every thought now but that of her bodily pain. "Where is your hat? I have plenty of warm cloaks. Stay! I will ring."

"Mark! Oh, *won't* you listen to me?" she cried, staying his hand. "It cannot be. I have taken—an oath."

"If you had taken forty thousand, love, it would make no shade of difference."

"And promised," she went on, wondering mistily over the concentrated haste and fear and anger in the tone which was yet so gentle to her, "that I would never listen if you— Where were we then? I forget sometimes. But there was music, and I knew you were going away. I—I heard it in the music, and I knew my summer was over, You said so—long afterwards: when they told me you were far away—beyond the bells. I knew it was true. To-morrow, you said—to-morrow a new scene of things might open. You said it all the time, while I cried *good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!* And you never heard, and the bells laughed; and Nuel said you were beyond them. But, Mark"—in a low quick whisper, freighted with bravery once more—"you may never again say you love me. The world is very great and wide, and you may say it to anyone but me—*anyone* but me; and I may not listen. But I shall hear only you. I heard it yesterday—no, not yesterday—when Helen and I stood listening in the street. Helen said it was a band playing *Zampa*; but I knew—I heard— Mark! it is Helen calling me. She"—in a low, faint whisper, as her clasped hands were pressed upon her forehead—"has headaches too. She told me of them this morning. She said they were like fire—here—b—hind her eyes. And—Mark, is it you? No—no, not Mark; that—that other name—what is it? No, don't say it. I cannot bear it. Be only *Mark* to me—for this little time. But you must not stay. I will keep that promise—if I die. And you

will forgive me, because I love you so ; and because my head aches ; and—oh ! Helen——”

The low miserable cry of utter bewilderment was hushed upon Mark's breast ; but there was no need of his loving words to quiet her, for thought and sight and memory were gone.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Was it not Fate (whose name is also Sorrow) ?

Poe.

A SLOW awakening, into a wide, dim, unknown land of mist and cloud, from which weird and shadowy forms came slowly forward ; changing and growing as they moved nearer and nearer, before a forest which was flaming in the distance. And at last pressing upon and deadening once more the faint senses which had been struggling back to life. Then another waking, into a land less misty and obscure ; where the snow lay white and undisturbed, and was falling too, far off among those shadowy forms, which were growing less wild and imperfect in the glow of sunset. No, it was not sunset. It was the moon, shining there across the snow while the stars sprang from it, one by one. No, there was no moon, and the snow was melting, and the sky was coming down and closing in, and—— Nora's fingers rested from their feeble groping. It was growing clear to her now, and faintly and slowly her eyes received the tranquil scene as it was, for the first time for many a weary, anxious week. Instead of the burning forest, the setting sun, or rising moon, a red fire glowed ; and where the stars had shone only two wax candles flamed. The clouds had all dissolved, and the gray firelit walls were standing still at last, and slowly forming pictures to the troubled, unsteady eyes ; while their soft tints were broken here and there—yet made more soothing still—by falling colourless curtains. The snow felt soft and smooth, but very solid, under her feeble fingers ; and the forms which had been so varying and transitory, grew definite and very still. Except the dancing of the fire-flame, how very still it all was ! So still that Nora knew it must be a dream, and that those two silent figures must be motionless until the scene had all melted, and she awoke to—to—

But *memory* had not awakened with the awakening of the fevered eyes, and they could only form distinct mute figures from the fading chaos. How many were there ? A great many—only a few—no, only one—yet more than one. One in the firelight far away, and another nearer to her—close to her—utterly still and silent. What were these motionless figures of her dream, and when would they melt ? The forms far off would melt too presently, when Nora awoke to—to—— No, it was all dark, and

when she groped feebly there, a pain came back to her which she could remember long ago ; and the darkness gathered close about her once again and shut out all.

Then there came another awakening, and this time there was a strange weak shrinking in Nora's gaze around the pretty silent chamber ; for she was faintly conscious now that this dream was fairer far than could be the awaking. Slowly—very slowly—the scene grew clear to her, though with the dreamy consciousness that this was not all ; that there was a world of dim and shadowy imagery moving beyond, which presently would blot it out. She had never seen this room before, with its white drapery, and those mellow landscapes which the golden light within the room touched and warmed so prettily. She had never seen that old serene face beside the fire, with placid eyes so often turned upon herself, and with curious hanging muslin on her wavy thick grey hair. She had never seen—stay ? she *had* seen some time—somewhere—the other still, calm form the room contained. Even though the eyes were closed, she knew the grave, pale face, and the fair hair that lay so smoothly under the soft lace cap. Where had it been ? But while it was impossible for memory to awake, it was hard even for thought to do so ; and so, though Nora had a vague and dreamy consciousness that she knew this gentle face quite well, and that it recalled in some dim way, pictures and flowers and a very far-off memory of sadness and misery—and was it Rachel or Micky ?—she let the thought die exhausted, while her eyes were still fixed upon the sleeping face. For how long they had been fixed there in this peaceful dream, Nora did not know, then, very quietly, the lady, who had been sitting so still beside the bed, rose and stood for a few moments at a little table which was placed near her easy chair. Nora saw her pour some medicine from a bottle into a glass, and even in this pleasant tranquil dream, Nora knew the draught was for her, and made a feeble, futile effort to rise and take it. But there was no strength for that, and her head had not left its pillow when this gentle, patient looking lady (whose face she remembered and yet could not remember) had put the glass to her lips. With a feeble attempt to thank her, Nora looked earnestly up into her eyes ; and suddenly the languid gaze was riveted, in a kind of shrinking childish terror which was new in every way to Nora, but which, in her great weakness now, made her lie and tremble like a panic-stricken child. Then, quite noiselessly, the gray-haired nurse came up, behind the lady who with this weird direct gaze held the glass to Nora ; and, by a sign, the old woman bade the girl take it and say nothing. So, still with the wondering question in her great hollow eyes, she drank the medicine, and tried to smile her thanks. But there was no vestige of a smile upon her unsteady parted lips, and her eyes grew wider and more fevered.

“Hush !” whispered the nurse, below her breath, just as if

Nora had spoken, "do not notice it, my dear. She will wake presently; but if we wake her it may be dangerous. Hush! close your eyes."

In her pitiful weakness, Nora obeyed without understanding; and while she lay thus, resting the sight which alone had awakened, memory slowly gave back a little of the past. She knew now where she had seen this patient-looking, fair-haired lady. It was among the flowers where she had found Micky, and among the pictures at which they had looked together; and it was in a peaceful, sheltered spot, where everything was silent and fragrant and dim; and where she had stood with her while some one else——

A pain like a stab shot through Nora's heart, and her eyes were opened with a startled feverish haste. Yes, it was Miss Gifford. Nora remembered it all now. The cottage in the park; the shadowy path among the yews; Mick at work among the verbenas; the paintings; the gentle words and hand-clasp of the sad looking lady; and then——

"My dear," whispered the old nurse in a timid, and even troubled voice, as she came up to Nora on the opposite side the bed, and bent her head to the pillows, "don't look so frightened. She will awake presently, and never know what she has done. It was right for you to have the medicine, so I let her give it. I saw what she was going to do, and I let her. She would be troubled, and ill perhaps, if we woke her. Take no notice, my dear. See how calm she sits. What need for you to look so terrified?"

Ah! what need indeed? Miss Gifford sat utterly motionless in her sleep, and now the lids had fallen over that vague, fixed gaze, and her hands were folded placidly in her lap. No, no need for fear. But something else was awakened now in Nora's mind, and these words (which, simple as they were, had been the first to break the silence of that long struggle with memory) seemed to make her even more weak and childish than she had felt in that long dream of hers; and she looked one moment into the old nurse's kindly face, and then burst into a feeble, tremulous fit of crying.

"Never mind, my dear, the old woman whispered, soothingly stroking the girl's wan, white cheeks; "don't try to stop the tears; let them come. Tears are healthy physic for a sick soul. Let them come, my dear. They will not wake my mistress; and they sound girlish and natural, and do even *me* good after this terrible time when you didn't know tears from laughter, and suffered too much to know what your trouble was. Cry on, dear. This is better to see than——what has passed."

CHAPTER XLVII.

Love lies deeper than all words.
 And not the spoken but the speechless love
 Waits answer ere I rise and go my way.

HEALTH and strength were creeping slowly, slowly back. The agony of physical suffering was gone, and there was nothing to struggle with now but a great absorbing languor. This languor was even yet a mystery to Nora herself, and on this very day—when, for the first time, she had been allowed to go beyond the garden gate—she was trying vainly to comprehend it.

"I should have thought," she said, pushing the short, clustering hair from her temples, and then holding her thin white hand to the light, as if she felt that it must be transparent, "that it would have taken years of sickness to make me feel as I do. Oh, Celia, I am so ashamed to be such a trouble, and such a burden, and such an expense. And I have no right to be here; and but for your real kindness——"

"You ought to be quite tired of saying that sort of thing now, Nora," observed Miss Pennington, in her gentle, matter of fact way; and trying to lose the fear with which she always now met Nora's eyes. "Everything else tires you, and I'm sure that very unnatural idea ought to do so. See, here comes Micky with his daily flowers. Do you know that really among those who have been anxious about you, Nora dear, Michael ought to stand quite high. You have no idea of how he grew to look, through all the time of your great danger—But don't let us talk about that time. We have you among us once more; that is pleasure enough to counterbalance all the past pain—to me, at any rate."

"When," asked Nora, smiling a little because she saw what a great effort Celia made to appear confident of her friend's restoration to them, "did you come, Celia? I thought—I don't think it was part of my dream when I thought you and I had parted for ever, and——"

"A dream, of course; only a dream," put in Celia, hurriedly "In real waking times it would be impossible, dear, for you and me to part for ever; but curious things *do* happen often in dreams."

"Tell me," pleaded Nora, her own clear thoughts reading how her changed appearance had shocked Celia, "how you came to me, and—and where everyone is. Oh, Celia, may I know? I ought not to ask—I am sure I ought not—but it is like a terrible thirst to me, the wish to know."

"I don't know what you remember," said Celia, very sadly. "Lord—Mr. Poynz," she corrected, remembering how Nora had left them before Mark Poynz had become Lord Keston, and feeling that only the old familiar names could be recalled to her

after her terrible illness, "brought you here, straight from London to Miss Gifford's cottage. I believe you had not the brain fever then, Nora dear, and were conscious of coming, but you would have lost all recollection of it now. As soon as ever the crisis was past, I was allowed to come. Oh, what an anxious time that was for us in Brighton!"

"How good of you to come from Brighton to me!" Is Mrs. Pennington there now? And is she quite well? And are you going back to her soon?"

"Not very," said Celia, in her sober, unequivocal way. "Not until you are able to come too, Nora, dear. Why do you look so grieved, or shocked, or something?" she added, astonished and even alarmed by the sudden pallor and misery of Nora's face. "Don't think sad thoughts, dear, or you will not grow strong again so fast as we wish. But the sea air will soon give you your old colour; and mamma will be so glad to have you with her again."

"I—don't know where to go. I have no home now in all the world."

It was not the first time that such words had fallen drearily from Nora's lips, and Celia received them, as she had done before, with a speechless gentleness, and a long pitying kiss; for her sympathy, loving as it was, had never been like Nora's in its power of lightening all sorrow to others, by devices born of utter self-forgetfulness.

"What is that?"

Nora had lifted up her head to hear, and she asked the question very suddenly in her nervous weakness. But Celia only smiled, knowing no answer was needed when she saw Nora's rapt gaze upon the tall gray spire among the trees.

"This is St. Thomas's Day," she said, "and Mr. Foster has gone to the village for service. The extra services are never held in the little church here in the park. Is not the chime pretty, dear?"

"Yes, I think so," said Nora, very low; "and yet, when I heard it first, my head began to ache—I wonder why?"

"Perhaps," suggested Celia, as utterly ignorant of any sad association with the chimes as Nora was utterly oblivious of it, "it is because you have been for a long time in such perfect silence. I think them so pretty, Nora."

"Pretty!" echoed Nora, her grave upward glance perplexed a little. "They are terrible, I think, or—or very beautiful—I cannot tell. I have heard music, just as I hear this, and not known whether it made me happy or sad. I—I do not wonder you smile, Celia, but you are very patient with me. I shall know better, and understand it all better, perhaps, when I am quite strong again. You will like to go to church, of course. Let me stroll a little way farther with you."

Their way led them past the little church in the park, and when they reached it Nora stopped with her hand upon the gate. She knew that if she went further, at her creeping pace, she should cause Celia to be late for service, and it was here that she would best like to rest. So when Celia had passed on, she sat down in the porch, with her soft fur cloak wrapped round her, and a great restfulness in her thoughts as well as her attitude. So still it was when the bells had ceased, that Nora bent her head with a dreamy, childish wonder whether she could hear the winter grass growing among the graves. And just as vaguely and dreamily as the old romance flitted through her mind, did the dim remembrances of the past time—the shadowy memory of joys which she was not sure that she had ever really felt—the softened pang of tears which she was not quite sure that she had ever shed. The one thing of which she was keenly conscious now, was that life had been given back to her, after she had parted from it; and that her feet had been guided back with tenderness from the brink of an open grave. And now how good it seemed to live! Sitting even here, among the dead, how beautiful life seemed! Even in the flowerless, fading winter time, everything seemed to *live*. Her glance went upward from the little quiet churchyard to the clear blue wintry sky, and Nora's thoughts rested, as they so often did, upon the memory of Helen Archer. There was no bewilderment there, and the minutes went by for Nora in a new and sweet tranquillity. But, suddenly, in one instant, this tranquillity fled; and Nora, shrinking back in her corner of the porch, pressed her hand upon her heart, as if she thus could still its swift and violent throbbing. All the repose had vanished now, for Mark Poyntz had opened the churchyard gate, and was coming towards her. And while he did so, her thoughts rushed wildly to and fro, grasping nothing; because of the strength and power of that one bitter cry—*It might have been!*"

But Mark saw nothing of this. He only saw her sitting, rather wearily it seemed, back in the shadowy porch; her eyes looking unnaturally large and dark in her delicate face; and a settled shadow in them as of unshed tears.

"How long will it take for the plat to grow, again, Nora?"

He said this easily and very naturally, he thought, as he stood beside her, and lightly touched the short wavy locks; but he could not help his voice betraying what it was to him to see her once again—given back to him from the gate of death.

"It is not right for you to sit here, my darling," he said, very tenderly, as he gave her his hand to rise; trying so hard to hide his deep anxiety, and to suppress his almost unconquerable longing to fold his strong, protecting arms about the slight and frail young form. "You remember this spot, don't you?"

"I remember," she said, trying, as he did, to speak with ease.

while her heart was full. "I remember well how Kerryline Brougger dyde ov the krewill usidge ov ur usban'. I was glad to see her grave again."

"Is there any other grave you would like to see, Nora?"

"Oh! so much, so much!" she cried; then bowed her head in her hands, and sobbed broken-heartedly; for she had been too weak for the bold effort at self-control, and the tears could not be kept back now at will. "I have so longed to know—where it is," she whispered, when at last the violence of her grief was soothed by Mark's quiet words. "If I could but have stayed with her—after. Oh! Helen, my dear, my dear!"

"Your staying in that room where she died, could not have kept you near her, Nora," Mark said, with quiet earnestness. "But if you thought so, let me show you how very near you are to her now. Come, my dearest. It is but a few steps."

There was a low iron rail around the grave, and Nora's fingers clung about it, as she stood trying to thank Mark for his thoughtful act; trying, uselessly, because her eyes, in their great wistful earnestness, told him all.

"You will like flowers on the grave, I think, sweet," he said, "instead of a stone. But Helen's name is so precious to me too now, that I have had it—you will soon see the little tablet, dearest; and you will be as glad as I am to have it on the chancel of this peaceful little church, among our own people—yours and mine."

"Oh! Mark." The cry came in real anguish from her lips, as the old sorrow came surging up to overwhelm all else. "Do not say it. It can never be. Oh! please, please let me try to forget. I—I wonder how long Celia will be?"

"She promised us to go to church this morning," Mark said, turning his haggard face from her sad gaze. "We knew you would like her to have the change, and she consented at last to leave you—to me. O my beloved, what a long, long time they have kept us apart!"

"Nora," he said, changing his tone suddenly as he met her sad beseeching glance, "what do you think of Miss Gifford and her old ayah? Come, tell me something about them—*anything*, only let me hear your voice as we saunter homeward. There, lean all your weight upon my arm. How tall your illness has made you look, my love; and so white too—but so beautiful! Do you know I begin actually to think Graham was right when he once told me that no one looking at you could imagine beauty in any other height, or size, or expression. I tried so hard to disagree with him, and failed so pitifully, love."

"Now," he added, presently, seeing what a sad quietness fell upon her when he spoke of those old times, "tell me what you think of Miss Gifford's nursing, and the wonderful flowers she has even in this winter time."

Nora told him, with no dearth of gratitude, of the kindness that was shown her daily and hourly at the cottage; and then, wooed on to talk, and led to talk of this cottage life because Mark saw she did not shrink from that, she told at last, in her puzzled, gentle way, of how upon that night when she first woke to consciousness Miss Gifford had, in her sleep, poured for her and given her the right medicine; of how the old nurse seemed to understand, and had bidden Nora take it and say no word to wake her. All this the girl told, simply because her companion tempted her on to talk to him; and so when in her last pause he begged her very earnestly to relate the whole scene to him once again, just exactly as it had occurred, she complied with genuine surprise.

"I think," she said, humbly, when she had done as he wished, "that the trouble she had taken for me, and the long watching and confinement which she had in her great kindness undergone in compassion for me, caused this. And I have so feared, ever since, that she might herself fall ill."

"But I think," said Mark, speaking quietly, as they walked on under the leafless boughs of the old oak, "that it may not be a new thing to her. We shall see."

"I shall never see her again, of course," said Nora, trying not to speak with regret, and wondering why Mark should show no anxiety himself over this story of hers. "I—I think I shall very soon be well enough to go, and—I must."

"My child, my restless, whimsical little lady, are you in such haste for Brighton? Think how happy Celia is in this dear little peaceful parish. And you have no idea how fond the people are growing of her. Ah, you are wondering how I know, I see. Do you imagine that because the Place is still closed and uninhabited, I may not prowl about here now and then for my own purposes—the very personification of a Wandering Jew? And have I not discovered, quite to my own satisfaction, how very content Miss Pennington is in this happy valley?"

"I remember," said Nora, thoughtfully—but her whole face brightened at the thought of Celia's pleasure—"how I used to fancy her enjoyment of Heaton, when she first came here—one beautiful summer Sunday. I pictured it all, and what she would tell me; but I have never heard——"

"Never," assented Mark, promptly; for it did not need the sudden sadness in her eyes to remind him of Celia's return from her visit to Heaton. "But now you see, don't you? And we are told, sweetheart, that things seen are mightier than things heard."

"Yes," assented Nora, knowing how the sight of Kerryline Bronger's gravestone had recalled so vividly the half-forgotten words which Willoughby Foster had said to her upon that happy day when she had last visited the little church: "but it is best to remember *nothing*."

"I think it is best to remember everything," returned Mark, in the cool and placid way which was so skilfully dissipating her nervous, painful shrinking from him. "And nothing lives more clearly in my memory than your first visit here, my sweet; and how we stood together by the lake—we too alone—and I told you the story of the last Lord Keston; and how I had a feeling that he was neither guilty of the crime they laid to him nor—dead But you would not recollect."

"Oh, yes," she said; but could not trust herself with other words.

"You asked me what first made me doubt that which everyone else believed," Mark went on, in his earnest way, "and I told you I would explain that when we went over the old house together. You are not strong enough to come with me yet, my precious one; but when we bring you home from Brighton, I must show you what first gave me the hope of being able to destroy an unjust suspicion."

"I must not come back," whispered Nora, as steadily as she could; strengthening the determination never to walk with him again in this delicious quietness and solitude, yet resolved to say as little as possible about this need. But when Mark stopped in his great seriousness, and she saw the steady determination in his eyes—while he yet could only speak to her with such great tenderness—she knew that her answers, resolute as she might strive to make them, could not move him in his love and care for her.

"Nora, my darling," he said, "I want there never to be anything but the clearest truth between you and me, and so I must tell you one thing now. In your illness, you could not guard the secrets which had been crushing your young life so pitifully. My love—oh, my love, do not shrink from me! To whom should they have been revealed but to me? I know that you have never uttered a word to me that is not truth, sweetheart, but you have not told the whole truth, and what you do not tell is a terrible burden to you which I would wholly bear. It cannot increase the weight upon me, but would lighten it. Can you not feel that yourself, my own beloved?"

"No, oh, no," she cried, with the old pitiful lifting of her hand to her head. "I may not tell—I dare not tell. And when you ask it, Mark—when *you* tempt me, it is so hard to keep my vow."

"Listen, Nora," said Mark, his chest heaving with the emotion which he tried so hard to suppress. "I know so much, that it will be dangerous—there will be danger for others who do not deserve it at your hands—for you to keep the rest from me. My darling, my love, you are little more than a child after all, and you must be guided by those who have lived long in the world of which you know so little; and who can bring out into the light,

and seize and disarm too, this vile foe with whom your weak little hands, tied and bound as they are, can never grapple in the darkness. Now listen to me, Nora, and just answer the questions I ask—I will make it easy for you, because I know so much. When Dr. Armstrong bound you to that vow, was it until any stated time, or indefinitely?"

"It was not Dr. Armstrong," faltered Nora.

"I understand all that, my dearest. It was indefinitely, then?"

"Yes."

"And the promises, however worded, consist in this: You are not to betray your parentage, or any of the confidences of Dr. Niel Armstrong; or to listen to—— What was it? We were always puzzled by that one promise."

"Never," said Nora, just as a dying man might repeat his physician's words of doom, "to listen to a word of marriage from—you."

"From me?" questioned Mark, gently drawing her to him that she might not see his face. "That was not what you said, sweetheart. Tell me exactly."

"Never," repeated Nora, in the same dreary, hopeless tones, "to listen to a proposal of marriage from—Lord Keston."

"My love," said Mark, with a laugh which startled her, "how it hurts you to say that name! Do not utter it again—yet; and presently it will grow so dear to you that you will wonder how your lips could ever have faltered over it."

"Oh, Mark!" she cried, lifting her clasped hands, "you will never tempt me to break my vow? I should know no happiness if I broke it, because I made it to my——Oh, Mark you *cannot* understand!"

"I understand very clearly and perfectly," he said, in his most gentle and caressing way; "and you shall not break your vow, even though I know the man to whom you made it. No; you shall utter Lord Keston's name often and often, in love and tenderness, and yet you shall never break your vow. I can give my beloved a test of my love too. Did you think the power was only Dr. Armstrong's? And yet you knew that you yourself were mine, my own!"

"But the power is not what you think," faltered Nora. "It is far, far greater."

"Is it?" questioned Mark, his tone full of concentrated passion, as he felt how this power had been exercised over her; "then it will need a little extra strength to throw it down, that's all. Any man who is wronged can right himself in time, Nora, and I am not afraid of any power that scoundrel may possess. Hush, my dearest! I know what you would plead. I understood all that before we met to-day; but we will not speak of it. What *your* father tells me of Dr. Armstrong I will believe, but never one word of what Dr. Armstrong tells me of *your* father,

Armstrong may do his worst now. I will let him lay bare his own villany, and you and I—don't shrink from me, sweetheart. Even in my passion I will not forget to what words I have promised that you shall not listen. But not even *your* entreaty can make me forget his villany, or my own determination to be rid of him. It will keep me here for a time, that is the worst. But, while I am separated from you, I shall feel that you are gaining health and strength by the sea; and you will think of me sometimes, working for you, my own love—and thus doubly and trebly working for myself."

"But you ought to rest," said Nora, very wistfully, as she glanced up into his lined and troubled face.

"I look very old, do I, sweet?" he asked, with his rare, pleasant laugh. "This has been a terrible time to me—I trust you may never know *how* terrible—but do not think of that. Think of happy, hopeful things. Think only of growing strong and well yourself, and that will be quite enough to make me the most vigorous fellow in Surrey. Oh, my beloved, when we return together, not Surrey alone, but all the counties in England could not contain a happier fellow. And yet—and yet, my darling," he added, with a gleam of the old quizzical laughter in his eyes, "you shall not receive any proposal of marriage from Lord Keston."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Then with eyes that seemed to darken his dark cheek ;
Let him go free, he cried ;
He hath his curse.

MOORE.

THE low arched avenue among the yew trees was not the usual and frequented approach to Heaton Cottage; for it was cut in an exaggerated curve from the park to the flower-garden at the side of the house; and—as if to make it still more private than its own gloom and semi-concealment naturally, or rather artificially, made it—its little iron gateway was screened entirely by laurels, skilfully planted beyond. Against this low gate, on the day before the arranged departure for Brighton, Nora stood deep in thought; while scarcely a breath of the wintry air touched her, and no sound disturbed the silence there.

Quietly and unperceived, she had left the house, because Celia had happened to mention that Miss Gifford expected Lord Keston; and she would stay here in the shadow and solitude until she could feel sure that he must have left the cottage again. Never, if she could possibly help it, did she venture to meet Mark, knowing how her own courage wavered in the presence of his, and how hard it was to feel they were really to live their lives

apart, while he, with such quiet determination, acted as if it need not be so.

"Just as if," Nora whispered to herself, "that sad truth were not truth; and as if I had not promised so solemnly. Yet he himself has said I shall not break that vow, and *he* would never tell me a falsehood, even——"

A step upon the gravel, far behind her, snapped the thought like the snapping of a thread; and there came into the girl's eyes a strange, mute yearning which was new to them, and inexpressibly pathetic.

"Have you heard Miss Gifford's last decision, Nora?" Mark asked, coming up to her just as if she had been expecting him, and addressing her quite calmly and placidly; though his gaze, as he stood opposite her at the gate, would have told her so much more, if she had ventured to look up and meet it. "She has decided not to go to Brighton yet—herself, I mean," he added quickly, because, watching her so anxiously, he had seen the shadow of a great disappointment fall on her face. "I do not mean that she has delayed the departure for all of you, Nora, darling—only for herself. She would not have done even that," he went on, speaking heavily a little, for he was certain now of what he had feared ever since Nora had crept from her room and met him for the first time—that she longed to avoid him, and to leave the spot where he could see her so often, and where his home lay, "only that she feels her presence necessary here—for a time. She had intended to go with you and return alone earlier, but she has arranged otherwise now, because Mrs. Pennington is coming up to-morrow, and will take charge of you and Miss Pennington; while I go—only to take charge of Foster, eh, sweetheart?"

"Shall *you* stay in Brighton?" asked Nora, utterly failing in her effort to make the question indifferent, while her heart beat with such a twofold fear; the fear for herself in his presence, and the fear for the long days when she would have to live her life without him.

"No," he answered gently. "I wish I might, though. Yes, I wish it in spite of you, dearest. Do you dream for a moment that I should be stayed by your coldness or caprice? Ah, my beloved, you little know me if you imagine it. The strength of my love could not be turned aside by such a trifle—— What, a real smile at last? How precious they are to me, now that they come so seldom! I remember thinking, on a certain day, which you of course have forgotten, when I had the privilege for the first time of carering—isn't that a fine Irish word, Miss Paddy?—across the bog behind Borak, that I never saw such a lovely smile in my life. But of course I have had time to change my opinion since then, haven't I? Ah, Nora, Nora, such a blush! And yet you coldly bid me leave you, and tell me we must

live our lives apart—we two! My child—my love, if you could for one moment feel as I feel when I speak thus, you could never say what you say, even—even,” he repeated, laughing at last, as he laid his hands gently on her shoulders, and looked down into her eyes with untold love and pride within his own, “to have your words treated as I treat them.”

A little pause, while Nora stood very still, the faint colour coming and going on her delicate face, as she suppressed her pain as well as her love.

“No, sweetest, I am not going to stay in Brighton,” Mark repeated, breaking the silence at last, in a tone which told nothing of the strong will resigned; “for I have business which must take me away for a little time. It will be very hard to leave you there, Nora; but I come that I may hasten our re-union; and I leave you with old friends who love you, and in a spot where you will win back the old bright health and girlish spirits.”

“I am quite well now,” said Nora, wistfully. “Quite well, though I am not like what I used to be—I can see that in the face of everyone who looks at me. It is not because I am—ill now. It is, I am older—and——”

“So much older, Nora, darling,” said Mark, with an involuntary movement, as if he must take her in his arms to comfort her, but refraining instantly, “that you ought to be wiser. But never mind; probably wisdom will come with the gray hair. Now I must go on to meet Doyle in Guildford.”

“Is Mr. Doyle here again?” questioned Nora, with the same mixture of shrinking and longing, with which she thought, or spoke, of all the friends of her old life.

“Yes, dearest, Doyle is rather busy in this neighbourhood just now. I believe he would tell you he had a ‘case’ here. He laughs heartily at being sent for to help our London solicitors—Another blush, sweet? How delicious it is to see them once more! Do you know Doyle recognised *our* house in a moment,” Mark added—while again the blush rose at hearing that pronoun which he used as if there could be no thought, for a moment, of his possessing anything which was not hers, too—“from the sketch he had seen in Mrs. Corr’s cabin.”

“But I thought your house was closed, and had been closed ever since——”

“And shall be closed,” concluded Mark, promptly, in her timid pause, “until its master and mistress go to live there together, in a joy the old house never has known yet. No one shall occupy it until then, my love. Did you not know why I never had the doors opened to any other rule? But I must not let you stand any longer. Even with all your waywardness, you are so unutterably precious to me, my own beloved, that I must even shorten these few happy minutes, and send you in to rest.”

“Good-bye,” said Nora, simply, but evidently without a thought of staying, when he did not wish her to do so.

After passing the gate, he could not look back and see her walk to the house, and it was well he could not; for the tears she had so bravely kept back in his presence burst from her now beyond restraint, and she stood in the gloom and solitude, with her face hidden in her hands, sobbing piteously.

"I cannot help it," she moaned to herself, when, at last the tears were stayed in utter exhaustion, and she stood with her hands upon her temples. "I thought I was not such a coward. I was not once—I think. But," she added, a wan smile breaking the tremulous sorrow of her lips, though it never touched her eyes, "I shall be stronger presently. This illness has changed me so. Celia said she scarcely knew me. Indeed, indeed I scarcely know myself. But I suppose everyone feels so—so very weak, and low, and helpless after brain fever. If—when I go away from here, I shall grow strong again, and—fit to work, and—and able to remember how solitary my life must be."

"Nora, Nora, dear!"

The gentle call reached her where she stood; but, following the call, even before Nora could answer it, Miss Gifford came into the avenue at Dr. Armstrong's side.

"I sought you everywhere about the house, my dear," she said, her face brightening when Nora came at once to her side, "until Dr. Armstrong suggested you might be here—a good guess, was it not? He has come to say good-bye, so I may go on and speak to Corr, leaving Dr. Armstrong to take you into the house."

"It is not good-bye I am come to say, Nora," spoke Nuel Armstrong, as soon as he had watched Miss Gifford out of sight, "though that plea served as well as anything else for an excuse to reach you. You knew perfectly well, even while she said it, that that was not true. Not very probable!" he cried, with a hard, forced laugh, while she saw, in real fear, how his face worked with a passion which was headstrong now and desperate. "*Good-bye!* Pah! Is all my love, and toil, and patience to end in such a coward's speech as that? Stay, Nora, I have something to say, and I must say it here. Unless," he concluded, using craftily his knowledge of her; "you wish it said before that sleepy-looking woman, who has no right to hear a word."

"Shall you be long? Is it much you have to say to me?" asked Nora, wearily; as she stood very still and pale against the dark green yews.

"It need not be much," he answered, all the old suavity of tone lost in his great eagerness. "I have need only to tell you I am ready to take you now, Nora, to your poor father. No wonder you look surprised, my pet; for it has been a hard long task for me to track him; or, rather, it has been a long enterprise, and *would* have been a hard one if I had not done it for *your* sake, and with my thoughts full of you the while. My darling, have

I not all my life worked for you? And is it strange that I should be the one to win you your wish at last, and crown your life with happiness?"

"That," said Nora, with proud quietness, "you can never do, Doctor Armstrong."

"Your childish freak of concealment I easily understood and excused," he went on, making a strenuous effort to hide from her the passion which was fast growing beyond his control; "but, you see, fate and fortune did not help you; and I know how glad you will feel now to transfer all responsibility into my willing and able hands. My beauty, I do not ask you to come with me to-day; I would not hurry you so; for until this minute you have not guessed that I was on my way to you with the good news, and the power (as well as the will) to give you perfect ease and happiness at last, and such enjoyment as life has never contained for you before. No, I will not hurry you so, Nora. I will go with you to Brighton to-morrow; and you will be stronger presently, and we can pursue our journey. Ah! Nora, to think what rapture that meeting will be for your wronged and ill-used father. So well I know how your heart yearns to him—the parent who has so unjustly all his life been deprived of his daughter's love and compassion."

"Doctor Armstrong," said Nora, calmed by her very fear of him, as thus he tempted her through her keen sense of duty, "I would follow my—my father anywhere, if you would put it into my power to do so. But even though you profess to pity him, you will not help me to go."

"Nora," he cried, passionately interrupting her, "I am here for no other purpose. I have travelled and toiled and waited for that end alone—to secure his safety, and to unite you. I have paved the way perfectly now, and I have only one task left, to leave my darling in her father's care."

"If you will tell me where he is, and let me go to him, I shall be grateful to you all my life," she said, earnestly. "Mr. Pennington will take me."

"I shall take you myself," said Nuel, with a sudden hard determination in his voice. "I shall come to Brighton with you to-morrow—why not? The Penningtons are old friends of mine, and the Fosters will be glad enough to welcome me. Then we will arrange it all at our ease. In a few weeks time, my pet," he went on, again stifling his eager violence, "you will look back and wonder how you could ever have felt so hopeless and solitary as you looked when I found you here to-day. I know how it was," he added, hurriedly intercepting her reply. "You were thinking of yourself as shunned and suspected, because you fancied the world must know your parentage. 'Don't think that wretched thought again. The world need never know. The world never *will* know in the future I have arranged for you. Will

anyone ever suspect what has gone before, when you are my dear young wife—honoured, admired, esteemed, and so fondly loved? Darling, who else would give you the wealth of affection I have given you all your life? Who else would give up for you what I have given up?—but I do not wish to speak of that. I did it because I loved you, not to *buy* your gratitude. I could not help giving my time and strength and thought to you, because my heart was yours—you see that, Nora?”

He asked the question suddenly, for even in his selfish vehemence he was shocked a little by her stillness and her pallor.

“I only see your cruelty,” she answered, very low. “Let me go to my father without these hard conditions, and I will go to the world’s end. If you will not, I—will not go.”

“You will not go!” he cried, his voice harsh and quick and cruel, as he had never allowed her to hear it before. “You will not go, you say? You will not go with me, after all these years of seeking and wooing you? You are to escape me at last, and choose another? No, by Heaven, that shall never be while I live! I have borne enough, and done enough, for you now, and I claim my reward. I *demand* it, Nora! I am no boy to be trifled with at your pleasure. Mine is no new love to be set aside carelessly for—any other man’s. You shall feel that, Nora. You shall realise that a man who in his middle age, has set his heart upon you, is not to be lightly rejected for one who—who would scorn and insult you if he knew you as I know you; while I—I love and seek you through all. But I swear he shall know all the degrading truth——”

“Oh! let him know,” she cried, in her longing for help and guidance. “Oh! let him know, and end this terrible secret!”

“He *shall* know—but not until I have taken you from his derision.”

“Miss St. George, you are lingering here too long. Come into the house with me, will you? I found I had forgotten rather an important message for Miss Gifford, so I had to turn back.”

Mark had come upon them so thoroughly unawares after passing through the little gate, and had spoken with such readiness and apparent ease, that even in the silence following his words, Nora stood as he had found her, her eyes wide and feverish in their courage, yet her lips apart, and her breathing quick and irregular in her fear.

“Miss St. George will return to the house when she chooses,” put in Nuel Armstrong, with an insolent mockery on his lips, “and she will not choose just at present. I am not likely to let my cousin stay out to injure her health; I have too much consideration for her, and too much experience in my profession. We need not detain *you*.”

“You could not,” said Mark coolly, as he took Nora’s hand. “Even *your* power has its limits, Dr. Armstrong.”

"I should have fancied," said Dr. Armstrong, his wrath breaking forth unrestrainedly now he felt Nora was leaving him, "that, by this time, you would have left off interfering between relations. You have brought about mischief enough through your sneaking practices."

For an instant Mark turned upon him, with tightened lips and indrawn breath; then he remembered Nora's presence, and turned away again with quiet contempt.

"Do as you choose," he said; "I will not interfere."

"Nora," Dr. Armstrong said, letting his eyes pass over Lord Keston's face with a supercilious smile, but evidently suspicious in that moment even of Nora, "I can trust you—in any company. I can trust you to recollect what matters relate solely to your own family, and on what subjects you have bound yourself to secrecy."

"Miss St. George is not one to break a vow," rejoined Mark, with calm disdain, "even though it were wrung from her by the meanest lies."

"You speak courteously," observed Nuel Armstrong, smiling as he hissed the words slowly, in his cowardly fury; "but that, of course, is what we are tempted to expect from our aristocracy. I am glad you have reached your height among them at last. The position must naturally gratify you. Only try to escape an unexpected descent. It would be mortifying and humiliating, to a lofty soul, to return to the untitled herd from which it so lately sprang; and—I may possibly live to see you do it. One other thing I would tell you before we part—and what I say I mean, Lord Keston—If I hear of you trying to worm yourself into my cousin's confidence, or to learn secrets she has sworn to keep (for honour's sake), I shall hold back my hand no longer."

"Do your worst: that is, if you have not already exhausted your worst."

Mark said this with unruffled disdain, for, though his wrath burnt fierce within him, his heart was full of compassion for Nora.

"Nora," cried Dr. Armstrong, throwing off, at last, every shadow of compunction, and letting loose his rancorous hatred to the man opposite him, "I will keep silence no longer—even for yoursake, and for that you have this man to thank, who wears the title which has been so fatal to your house. When you recall this scene, remember that *I* would have spared you, but that his malice and arrogance wrested all forbearance from me. No need to tell you to whom I refer, Nora, when I say I will bring *him* here now. He shall face his verdict, and then, when the truth is known, you will see how lowly this man will value—your father's daughter! Then you will see who was your real friend, and loved you; knowing that very truth, which will excite his contempt. It is time for my revenge now, and I will take it."

"If you feel yourself able to go through with it," observed Mark, with easy negligence, "you cannot begin too soon."

"You speak without understanding," rejoined Nuel, with a fierce, furtive glance into the face of the younger man.

"No; I fancy I understand," he answered, in his leisurely way, "and I fancy I can gauge your power, sir. You threaten that you will bring to England a man who—if known to be alive here—would be captured by law, for a crime committed more than eighteen years ago. No matter whether he has escaped the letter of the law or not, he will be ruined for life as an English—well, simply an English gentleman, let us say."

"Ruined for life!" sneered Nuel. "That is a novel way of regarding the impossible future of a criminal. I have need but to swear to his identity—and, by Heaven! I will do so, unless Nora herself pleads with me,—and he dies as a murderer should."

"You will do your part promptly and skilfully, I have no doubt," said Mark, as he led Nora away. "Why should you delay, through any trifling qualms at all? Put the finishing stroke to your long career of personal ambition and animosity. I shall be prepared. I will even court that trial which you threaten. And, in the meantime, as you know quite well, you have nothing to fear from Miss St. George's betrayal of a secret of yours."

Nora, Mark whispered presently, as he paused a moment, in doubt whether Dr. Armstrong would follow them to the house or not, "do not tremble so. It will be all well when he has done his worst, as now he threatens to do. I have been expecting this. I would myself have hastened it long ago—I mean, as soon as the power was mine, on my uncle's death,—but, in my search for you, sweetheart, how had I room for other thoughts and projects? He will scarcely, even now, act before I am ready for him; for, when I have left you, my love, I shall have no strong impulse to keep me lingering here. And then, when this last cloud has passed, we shall—Dearest, do not let that old shadow fall across your face again at words of mine. I have made a promise myself, have I not, to help you in keeping yours? You shall *not* listen to any plea of marriage from Lord Keston and yet, my beloved, you shall love him—just as he loves you."

CHAPTER XLXIX.

Latet anguis in herba.

VIRGIL.

Have I not had my brain scar'd, my heart riven,
Hopes sapp'd, name blighted, life's life lied away?

BYRON.

THE arrival in Millwall Docks of a Swedish steamer from Gothenburg was not an event sufficiently rare to create excitement on that account alone, yet the excitement in the midst of which two

gentlemen landed from the *Kung Ring* was no new thing, as they understood well; though it was quite apart from that inevitable noise and seeming confusion with which every vessel is hailed into English port.

"If I had been brought here blindfold," said the elder man, speaking in a low, refined tone, while the jargon and the *patois* went on around them, "I should not have distinguished this as the English shore."

"All the better," said Mark Poynz, promptly, while he led his companion towards the cab which had been called for him. "I do not wish you quite yet to feel that you are at home in England. Even if we are detained in town for a longer time than we expect," he added, coolly, as they drove away, whilst his shrewd eyes rested upon a man who, as they awaited him, raised his stick to summon a passing hansom, "we shall probably find a wholesome excitement in the detention itself."

Lord Keston's companion was a man of little more than forty years of age, yet the stoop in his narrow shoulders, his scanty hair, and the dreamy, inlooking expression of his eyes, gave the impression of a much older man. A strong contrast he was to Mark, yet there was some strange, subtle resemblance in the voices of the two men, uninterfered with even by the slightly foreign accent of the stranger. This resemblance struck Mark himself later on, as they stood before the fire in a private sitting-room at their hotel, talking earnestly and thoughtfully; and he spoke of it at the last with a little amusement. While his companion paused before answering, with a nervous hesitation which seemed habitual to him, Mark walked to the window, and looked down into the street. He had not stood there many minutes before a man came sauntering from a shop opposite, and crossed directly to the hotel.

"We may just as well avoid all fuss and publicity," observed Mark, coolly, as he turned from the window, "and hasten through this unpleasant affair. By this time my telegram will have reached Doyle at the Inns of Court Hotel. Arthur, my dear fellow," he added, earnestly, laying his hand for a moment on the shoulder of his friend, "don't look so downhearted. Remember, you have nothing to fear as an *eventual* barrier to your return to the old home and life, to the restoration of your daughter, and the public acknowledgment of your innocence. You have not, indeed; and no man would shrink at going through a little temporary harass and delay, to ensure such a result."

"Tell me of——"

"No," interposed Mark, with that resolute firmness of his which was so quiet, "I will tell you nothing of Nora. What a persistent fellow you are, to return to that request again and again, in spite of me! No, you would only say I exaggerate

everything. If there is one subject I dare not trust myself to talk of just now," he added, both his eyes and voice most earnest, "it is that which fills *my* thoughts as well as yours. Come, you who have so bravely spent these years of exile and denial, would never show the white feather at the very last—when such a different life is opening—just because we must needs stumble over the threshold. I'm afraid that adroit and patient officer is very tired of keeping his eye upon me. He so thoroughly deserves his reward at last, that I will go and anticipate it for him."

So when, ten minutes afterwards, the man who had waited until this hour to arrest Arthur Poynz, came up to the room to act upon his information, Mark came with him; and the departure of the three seemed quite simple and natural, and altogether unlike a legal arrest.

CHAPTER L.

If we are wrong'd, why, we can right ourselves;
If we are plagued and pester'd with a fool
That will not let us be, nor leave us room
To do our will and shape our path in peace,
We can be rid of him.

Clough.

"DOYLE," whispered Mark, in his leisurely way—the Irish lawyer sat anxiously scrutinising the faces in the police-court while Lord Keston spoke to him—"Dr. Armstrong looks pretty confident of holding the winning card, eh?"

The lawyer nodded without a word, his attention thoughtfully fixed upon Nuel Armstrong, knowing well the deposition he had prepared. He knew how Dr. Armstrong would testify to the fact that Arthur Poynz had been suspected of administering poison, in the year 1858, to one Catherine Say, at Heaton Place, in the county of Surrey, and had escaped before the conclusion of the inquest; throwing his hat and cloak into a certain lake of deep water, with intent to elude the law by a suppositious death.

All this Nuel Armstrong was slowly and distinctly rehearsing in his mind, when the oath was administered, and the presiding magistrate interrupted it with a question which—as far as the listeners could tell—had at that moment struck him.

"Are you being sworn upon the Gospels?"

"I am sworn," returned Nuel, with the air of scornfully dismissing an irrelevant subject, "in the usual way."

"Do you," continued the magistrate, unmoved, "believe in the Gospels?"

With the calm and supercilious smile which so often stirred

his thin lips, Dr. Armstrong glanced into one or two of the faces around him, as he answered,

"I believe in them of course—as men generally believe in them—as detached portions of the history of a certain epoch."

"Do you believe in them?" persisted the magistrate, without the slightest change in the expression either of his face or voice.

"I acknowledge," Nuel answered, still with the smile upon his lips, "just what all sensible and thoughtful men acknowledge—that they are trustworthy records of a particular age. And beyond that, I consider myself bound in honour to speak the truth, and the whole truth, after being sworn upon them."

"There is no need at all for you to enlarge upon the subject," returned the magistrate, briefly. "Your answer can only be a word. Do you believe in the Scriptures—yes or no?"

"In a general way, and for this purpose, I——"

"Attend to my question, if you please," interposed the magistrate, with emphasis on the reiterated query. "Do you believe in the inspiration of those Gospels on which you have been sworn? If you do not, your oath cannot be taken."

"I—no man believes in the whole," asserted Nuel, his plausible smile growing an effort to him, as his fury was roused. "But I consider myself bound on my oath to utter only what is the truth."

"Then," observed the magistrate, in a rather raised, quick voice, "you do not believe in a God."

"I do not understand such a question here," returned Dr. Armstrong, his lips tightening, as his eyes fell upon the bent head, and easy, apparently inattentive expression of Mark Poyntz.

"It is a simple question. Have the kindness to answer it simply too."

"I do not understand the term."

"I think I may safely say then," remarked the magistrate, pointedly, "that you are the only man present who does not do so."

"There may be a Being of——"

"No circuit of words, if you please," was the reply, uttered with growing emphasis. "I call upon you to say if you believe there is a God?"

"I have already answered that question," replied Nuel, his lips growing hard and dry upon his teeth.

"No, you have not."

"I have already said that I believe in portions of the history where that name is mentioned."

"You do not believe then," insisted the magistrate, impatiently at last, "in the Gospels on which you have been sworn?"

"I do not——"

"You do not? Stand down, if you please. I will not allow any one to be accused by one who dares stand here and deny his

Maker ; or publicly avow his disbelief in the Scriptures on which he is, as a witness, sworn. Stand down."

* * * * *

"Lord Keston," whispered Mr. Doyle, his face red in his irrepressible excitement, "is our witness able to appear ?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER LI.

Then be not coy, but use your time ;
And while ye may, go marry ;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.

HERRICK.

THE soft gray haze of twilight was creeping slowly upwards, veiling sea and sky ; and, through it the lights upon the pier at Worthing shone dim and blurred ; while now and then the flash from the distant lighthouse pierced the mist, and then seemed to die out suddenly, as if its strength had been exhausted by that effort.

With the faint gray mingling of sea and sky before them ; the long chain of lights upon the shore behind ; and gay life and idleness about them ; the groups lingered ; talking, reading, or thinking, upon the West Pier at Brighton. The bandsmen were silent just now in their little raised pavilion, and the great waste of chairs around them was almost unoccupied : yet there was a goodly crowd of figures moving to and fro in this evening hour.

Near the pier-head ; where the gloom so subtly creeping from the water, seemed to pause, as if the light and gaiety behind had stayed it on its way inland ; two little groups had met and joined, while many pairs of idle eyes rested upon them. Leaning back on her seat, facing the people, not the sea, Genevieve Foster sat, with a novel in her hands ; but her eyes, though fixed upon its pages, had a sullen expression in them for which the novel could not be to blame. Near her, sitting sideways, with one elbow on the back of the seat, was Willoughby ; his usually merry eyes full of perplexity, and his words breaking off every now and then in real and uncharacteristic embarrassment, as he sought to win his sister's whole attention. A few yards away, Mrs. Pennington walked slowly to and fro upon her husband's arm ; and following them came Mrs. Foster and Celia, talking cheerfully together. Will's eyes went a little further still, to where Nora stood very still against the outer edge of the pier, looking out across the dusky sea, with lovely dreaming eyes. He saw that others watched her too, and he smiled a little, knowing how unconscious she was of any admiring glances ; but the smile was very short-lived, and swiftly his gaze grew anxious again, and returned to his sister's face.

"You don't help me at all, Gena," he fretted. "I certainly expected you would feel for mother, if not for me—and yourself, and suggest some way of breaking it to her."

"If it is quite impossible for you to discuss Victoria's prospects, except in such a provokingly funereal tone," observed Genevieve, without glancing up, "pray don't discuss them at all with anybody."

"But if you tell mother without preparation——"

"How *terrible* it would be!" put in Miss Foster, with her supercilious smile. "How very terrible! Victoria has chosen her own husband (as any sensible girl would do), and married him without bridesmaids or cake. Oh, poor Willoughby, to have to break this terrible, overwhelming news to his poor mother!"

"You put it kindly, I must say," Will answered, angrily. "No wonder I dread your telling mother, if *that* is how you look at it."

"Then how do *you* look at it?" she asked, in a scoffing tone; but her face grew a trifle paler as she spoke.

"How do I look at it?" echoed Will, indignantly, "Why, as anyone who has a grain of feeling in him—or of honour—must look at it. She knew right from wrong, and truth from falsehood. If she didn't at first know a gentleman from a sneak, she must now have known one from an unbeliever and a liar. And if she did not know how to act as a lady, she might at any rate have behaved with ordinary womanly reserve. To think that my father's daughter should have joined that villain and married him—knowing what she must have known."

"If it has been an unwise step," observed Miss Foster, icily, "she will suffer, not you."

"I declare," said Will, his subdued voice full of rage, "I'm tempted to think you have no heart at all. For pity's sake, leave it to me to tell my mother this miserable news. I detained you here to beg for your help and advice. I don't want either now."

"Then I have done you good," smiled Gena. "If you considered that you needed help in disclosing the fact of your sister's marriage to Dr. Armstrong, you must have been rather weak or out of sorts. I am glad you feel no longer so."

"If Doctor Armstrong had courted her openly and honourably and she had chosen to be such an idiot as to accept him, even knowing all I know now," fumed Will, "I would not have made any trouble for her, by putting difficulties in the way. But to do as she has done; to let him show himself the liar he is, to accept the burnt-out ashes of his regard; to fly at his call; to marry him in secret, and voluntarily share his shameful and degraded reputation! Good heavens! Genevieve, how can you know it all, and yet be so unmoved?"

"I see it a little differently," she answered, with slow distinctness. "Tory had allowed Dr. Armstrong to win her affection, even while, perhaps, he was tempted to pay court to Nora St. George's fortune. And now that the law has made good use of

a peculiar phase of his belief, and meanly turned it to account, against him, she gives him the regard he had successfully sought and fulfils an old promise to marry him."

"Genevieve," whispered her brother, in real surprise and even pain, "can you really look at this disgrace as you are pretending to do? Or do you say this only in your pride? Do not fear. I am not going to seek *pity* from anyone. And I'm sure, if you are afraid of Nora fancying *you* are humiliated —"

"What has Nora to do with me at all?" cried Miss Foster, rising quickly, with a cold, unmirthful smile. "Don't drag her name so constantly into your conversation, please. You have no idea how wearying it is. But I do not ask so impossible a favour as you think, so don't look crestfallen. I am going away in a day or two. I am going to Paris, to an old school-friend of mine, and I shall not hurry back. *You* shall take your turn now as the recipient of mamma's advice and sympathy, and—senseless praise of other girls. Pray give her plenty of Nora's society and Celia Pennington's, and she will be content, and not at all sorry for my absence."

"Oh! Gena, how unjust you are!" cried Will; but she was strolling on now, and by a sign she bade him leave her.

"How miserable it is!" he mused, as he slowly turned. "But—yes, I daresay she will be different when she comes back from Paris. Poor mother!"

With the utterance of his mother's name in his thoughts, came the remembrance of what only *he* must tell her; and with a sigh he went on to seek her; slowly, very slowly, while he wondered how he could lighten the blow for her. His eyes wandered longingly to Nora, where she still stood looking far away, so absently and dreamily. The young figure seemed very tall and slight in its mourning dress, but the short, pretty face was no longer white as the white fur that muffled it, but had regained a little of its old soft rose-tint.

"No," thought Will, staying his willing steps, "it would be unfair to ask Nora. How could she utter a word of consolation to mother, while she knows Armstrong so thoroughly; knows how persistently he sought her up to the last moment when he dared to venture into her presence; while, I suppose, all the time he was pretending to care for Tory? No, I must not ask help from Nora. I—I know what I will do."

His step quickened a little in that moment of relief, for he had caught sight of his mother, with her arm in Celia's. Joining her, and taking her other arm within his own, while, in a new, anxious, almost timid way he begged Celia not to go away; he led them from the pier to his mother's pleasant rooms upon the parade, and there he told her of her daughter's flight; while Celia cried a good deal, and spoke very little; and yet was so gentle and tender with the unhappy mother, and so quiet and compassionate, that afterwards, when Mrs. Foster looked back

to that sad hour, she fancied that Celia had been a great consoler, and had made the shame and sorrow less for both herself and Will.

It was a short story, though the mother's tears interrupted it so often, and made the telling of it take a long time. Early on the previous morning Victoria Foster had left home, professedly to spend a day or two with a young friend who lived at Hove. That afternoon, as Willoughby sat writing in his mother's lodgings, while she and Genevieve were out, he had received a letter from his younger sister, posted in Dover. She told him she had been married on the previous day to Dr. Nuel Armstrong, at the church of St. Stephen, in Walbrook; that they were on their way then to Paris; that she was very happy; and desired him to give her love to her mother and Genevieve. Such a thoroughly heartless and selfish letter it was, that Will pretended just now that he had lost it, and told the story in his own way.

"We can do nothing, I suppose," moaned Mrs. Foster, at last. Tory is of age by her father's will, and knew the man she was marrying. But you will go up, and see the register at St. Stephen's, Will?"

"Yes, as soon as ever Lord Keston comes down. The law proceedings are all over now, and I fancy he will be here to-night."

The band had begun to play upon the pier, when Mark Poyntz entered, and went slowly along it; glancing at every figure he met, but with no eagerness of scrutiny, for he knew how instantly he should recognise the form he sought when he came near enough to see it. Many eyes followed him—for he was not one of the usual loungers on the pier—and they grew inquisitive too, trying to reconcile the slow and leisurely step with the evident concentration of both gaze and thought. But, unconscious of any glance bestowed upon him, Mark went on; until at last, at the very end of the pier, he saw that his search was over; and in his sudden great content, as well as in his fear of startling Nora, his step slackened instead of hastening. So he went softly up to her, and stood beside her, with his hand on hers; and though she started a little, the grave thoughtfulness within her eyes died instantly in the light of her great joy—a joy which she would never have let him see had he not come upon her unawares.

"Ah! didn't that startle you—the sudden splashing of the oars below? What a ghostly little boat, to come gliding so unexpectedly from under the pier!"

Nora said this nervously, turning away from Mark to look down upon the water; for she had remembered now, and the childish tears rose to her eyes when she felt how unable she had been to hide from him the gladness his coming gave her. And seeing this, Mark bravely still (while his own strong impulse tempted him to shatter resistlessly every barrier between them) restrained the words which he knew that she felt she might not hear.

"Where are they all, Nora?" he asked, as his warm strong fingers held her hand within his arm. "Hannah told me—I am so glad to see Hannah back in your service, darling—that you were all on the pier."

"So we are," said Nora, grateful to him for speaking only thus. "Is—*is* Miss Gifford not come then?"

"No, sweet. She is awaiting you—at home."

"I do not understand," faltered Nora, moving slowly on. "I have no home."

"Ah, I forgot that," said Mark, in his cool way, and with no sign of the effort which it cost him to speak to her without betraying all his heart held of love, and care, and tenderness. "Well, we must go and see how the mistake has arisen. She certainly told me to bring you home soon, and to say she awaited you there."

"She has been very, very kind to me," said Nora, earnestly. "I hope I may see her again."

"You have yet to hear, sweetheart, the reason for her not coming to Brighton. It is rather a long story, and can only be told at home. How soon will you come with me?"

"I wonder where Celia has gone," said Nora, wondering why Mark spoke of home with such a new and happy tone of voice; but never guessing how his utterance of the word made her own eyes soften with an inexpressible hope and happiness. "May we walk on, and look for her?"

They met Mr. and Mrs. Pennington presently, but could find none of the others, so they strolled from the pier, guessing that Celia had unthinkingly sauntered homewards with the Fosters.

"Then will you tell us nothing, Lord Keston, until we reach Heaton?" asked Mrs. Pennington, laughing, as they stopped for a last look across the shadowy sea. "And do you really expect us to start to-morrow?"

"If you please," said Mark, with rather unusual gravity. "I have my horses here, and will drive you at any hour you will arrange. Perhaps Foster and his mother will come with us. Miss Genevieve is going to Paris, Will tells me, and her sister—but I can tell you these items of news by-and-bye. Nora, will you walk on with me to see Mrs. Foster? You are not too tired, are you? Ah, you look so much better, my beloved. I never can be grateful enough to the sea air for bringing the dainty roses back. And presently, when you and I—My love, do not shrink from me. I am not going to break my word; only when we go home, I have a story to tell you; and then you will tell me something about that love-test of yours. I daresay you will never see Dr. Armstrong again, dearest; but possibly you may find the test fulfilled, even in spite of him. We shall see. Why are you stopping? Oh! is this where Mrs. Foster lives? Nora darling, I have sad news to take to her; but I am not afraid, because I am taking you to her at the same time, my own beloved."

CHAPTER LII.

Whose glory was redressing human wrong.

TENNYSON.

INSTEAD of guiding his horses round to the cottage (when they reached Heaton next morning), Mark took them through the park to Heaton Place, and drew them up upon the gravelled sweep before the wide, arched door of the silent old house.

"Nora, isn't it strange?" whispered Celia, in a little flutter of delight and excitement. "But I'm so glad Lord Keston is really living here at last. Mr. Foster will be so glad, won't he? See, there's Miss Gifford in the hall. What a beautiful place it is! This reminds me of the wild romances you used to invent in old days, Nora dear, where the people were for ever coming unexpectedly upon marvellous old castles. Do you remember?"

"That's too bad a question," laughed Nora, softly. "Even you ought not to remember how silly I was in those old days."

"Not silly, dear," asserted Miss Pennington, soberly. "Only always so happy and content—with nothing. You used to astonish me often and often."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mark, from behind Celia. "I refuse to believe it. No one could ever have been astonished by anything Nora either said or did. It was always so exactly what persons would naturally expect."

"You will never forget my excursion to Lambeth, I fear," said Nora, her cheeks very pink and her eyes very shy, as Mark led her across the wide paved hall.

"Never," he answered, coolly. "At frequent intervals all through our lives I shall remind you of that day—and of many and many another," he added in a whisper.

The servant who had opened the outer door to them had thrown open a door on the right-hand side of the hall; and now Celia and Nora and Mark followed Miss Gifford and Mr. and Mrs. Pennington into the room to which it led.

"I think lunch is ready for us," said Mark, in his cool and leisurely way, as he closed the door behind them; but I want you to spare us a few minutes first, if you will. We have a little story to tell Nora here, and I know she will like you to be present too."

He had drawn up a couch for Mrs. Pennington and Miss Gifford, but Nora had walked up to the wide, low window, and stood looking out thoughtfully; remembering well that this was the scene of that little water-colour sketch in Rachel Corr's cabin, and recalling that one day when Mark himself had told her the sad legend of this house. Was he going to tell this story again to-day, and not to herself alone? No. Evidently they too had heard it before, for Mark only said,

"We think that in this room we can tell you the end of the

story better than in any other spot. Nora, do you remember it, or do you wish me to tell you any part again?"

"Oh, I remember quite, quite well," she said, her eyes fixed upon the spot where she had stood with him in the sunshine while he told her.

"This was Arthur's room," Mark said—"I will call him Arthur still, because, as you know, the title never reached him. When I first came here (I was paying a visit to my uncle then), this room was filled with his machinery, and chemicals, and a hundred specimens of his odd tastes and pursuits, and I investigated everything; for such work and such experiments had a zest for me too. At last one day I made an unexpected discovery. I need not tell you how, Nora. That will do another time. I found that that one fresco—just above your head, Mr. Pennington—fitted into the wall with a spring, and, when taken away, disclosed a narrow, secret staircase. Some day, Nora, you will climb it, but not now. I can tell you what I found, just as well as if you had seen the little turret-room to which it leads."

As Mark spoke, sitting opposite Nora at the window—for she was sitting now, her eyes fixed thoughtfully upon his face, while she followed every word,—he rarely addressed anyone except herself; but the Vicar and his wife sat listening quietly, and did not seem to wonder why the story should be told to Nora.

"That turret-room opens to the battlements, by a trap-door which cannot be stirred from without, but which can be opened from within with very little difficulty. In this dim little room I found one or two things which—gradually, I think, not all at once—excited a strange suspicion in my mind. First, I found what seemed to me the remnants of an old balloon; but presently I discovered that the whole balloon was there, only cut into pieces. Then I found portions of a man's dress, an empty bottle, dry crusts of bread, and torn pieces of paper. For hours, Nora, I have sat in the gloom of that secret chamber, trying to bring my vague surmises into shape. I seemed to see so much, and yet, when I brought what I saw fully into the light, it dwindled into so little, for want of the key to all. Going back again and again to that story of Arthur's escape, I grew to feel quite sure that he had, by means of this little balloon which he had himself constructed, returned to the Place, and taken refuge in this unknown room; from which, one day long afterwards, he may safely have escaped in disguise, leaving behind him the clothes he had worn when he was supposed to have been drowned, some of which were afterwards found in the lake. Can you follow me, Nora?"

"Yes."

"Though I seemed to see that so plainly, there were still, as I say, great gaps where I could fit nothing; and I was obliged to wait, only watching earnestly, lest the slightest clue should escape

me. This was not my own house, and I had no right to act for the one who bore Arthur's title (even if Arthur himself were innocent, and had a right to it, as I firmly, and yet almost unreasonably believed—did I not tell you so, Nora, long ago?); so I could only wait. But, while I waited, I searched well for any trace of Arthur himself; and Miss Gifford must remember well how sometimes I wearied her with questions."

"Yes, I remember," Miss Gifford said. But she answered Mark's smile with one which was even grateful, as well as tranquil and content.

"But she never helped me in the slightest," Mark went on; "she was too loyal to her old friend, and too faithful to her promise; so, as I said, I had to wait. At last, Nora, came that day when I was summoned so suddenly—I will not recall that," he added hurriedly, when he saw how the colour left even her lips as that evening was brought before her once again. "After that the title was mine, and the power to act. You understand, sweet? But then began my search for you, and the other search was almost forgotten—almost, not quite, for I had put machinery into motion which worked on while my own misery—— Nora, we will pass that time by, and I will ask you if you remember telling me one day—that first day you were allowed to walk to the little church, and when I met you there—how Miss Gifford had given you your medicine in her sleep. Yes, I see how clearly you remember it," he added, following her grateful, loving glance across at Miss Gifford. "Nora, those words of yours seemed somehow to put into my hand the key which I so long had wanted. I went at once to Miss Kate, and told her what I fancied. I had no fear of her resenting my words, or discrediting yours; and she listened kindly, as I knew she would, whatever pain they cost her."

"She, too," added Mark, after a little pause, while his warm, clear glance rested on Miss Gifford's face, "had never believed in Arthur's guilt, only—it had all been so strange to her; so utterly inexplicable."

"But—but *she* did not give the poison—even in her sleep?"

This was Nora's whispered cry as she crossed the room and bent to kiss Miss Gifford's shaking lips. But Mark went on very quietly, only turning his eyes now away from her.

"She fancied at once, as I did, that this was the solution of the mystery; but as a suspicion and surmise that knowledge must have kept in our own hearts, Nora, for the telling would have done no good, and only pained her uselessly. But, in her great desire for justice to be done, at any cost to herself, she followed up the clue, and at last, tempted on gently and imperceptibly, Miss Gifford's old Indian nurse—you know the gentle, kind old woman, Nora—confessed all that we had been unable to make clear. She, sitting sleeping in the outer room that night

had awakened just in time to see her young mistress pour the drops and put the glass to old Mrs. Say's lips. It had only taken two or three seconds, and before she could reach the bed, Miss Kate had put down the empty phial, and retaken her place beside the bed. The old woman, who had always known that her mistress, in times of great agitation, or illness, used to walk and act in her sleep, had been so urgently advised never to awaken her by a cry or a shock, that she would not make a sound. Then, in the few moments of utter silence before the dying woman started from her pillows, she had resolved never to confess a word of what had occurred, as she felt sure it would be laying with her own hand the charge of murder upon her favourite. Remember, Nora, she was not an Englishwoman. She knew nothing, of course, of our law. She had only a vague fear of its power to put Miss Kate to death, if she betrayed her act that night; and with her Indian swiftness and cunning she settled herself once more in her seat, and made Arthur find it difficult to awake her when, a few minutes afterwards, the dying cry had aroused him and Miss Gifford.

"After this confession," continued Mark—there had been another little pause, and Nora had gone back to her seat now, and was once again following the words on his lips, her hands folded in her lap, and her whole attitude very still—"Miss Gifford at once gave me the clue to Arthur's whereabouts, and was far more anxious even than I was, that justice should at last be done to him, let the confession cost her what it might. I soon found him, Nora, and brought him to England; while Mr. Doyle, and my own solicitors, paved the way for us. You will not understand that quite yet, I daresay. I need not tell you what Arthur had thought, poor fellow, all this time. Perhaps Miss Gifford is right, and he must really have suspected *her*, even against his will. It is hard indeed to think how else he could have accounted for the act; but he has not told me. When we reached London, we found that Dr. Armstrong had laid *his* plans too for our return, and we had not been an hour in England before Arthur was arrested. My dearest, turn your pitiful eyes away for a few minutes. This part of the story I hate to tell you. Armstrong's evidence—thanks to some stray remarks which Mr. Pennington had casually let fall in my presence when we were speaking of him, and which Doyle's natural sagacity followed up—was rejected as worthless. Then the old ayah made her confession, in a clear, straightforward way, which made it doubly convincing; and Miss Gifford herself did the rest. No need to tell you all that passed, or had to be looked into. But Arthur left the court a free man, acknowledged innocent of that old crime, whose shadow had so long rested on his life; and gratefully and hopefully he brought Miss Gifford back to her peaceful little cottage to rest. For it had been a trying time for her,

Nora ; and for that it was that she stayed from Brighton when you went."

"And I," said Nora, wonderingly and sadly, "fancied it was because she was so tired of me, after the great trouble I had given her for so long."

"You should never fancy," observed Mark ; but he lowered his eyes for a moment. "Nora, take your thoughts back again for a few minutes to that night so long ago, for I want to make it all clear to you. That balloon that I spoke of was made, as I thought, by Arthur himself in this very room. The plan of escape, by its means, was his own, but it could not be done without help, and Miss Gifford helped him, and kept his secret. I need scarcely try to tell you how it was managed, because it will all grow so clear to you presently. He carried the balloon down to the boat-house on the lake-shore, while Miss Gifford, in the turret-room, slowly unwound the cord whose other end was attached to it ; Arthur making deep footprints in the snow as he went. On the edge of the water he made the marks which next morning so thoroughly misled the police. Then from the roof of the boat-house, he entered the balloon, throwing his coat into the lake ; and Miss Gifford turned the wheel another way now, and gradually brought the little balloon to the turret-roof. The rest was soon done, just as I used to see it all. The balloon was wanted no more, and so was destroyed, food and a disguise were soon procured, and after a time, when all suspicion was dead (because the object of the suspicion evidently was so), he escaped from the old house, and left England in safety. He was clever, and he was fond of work, so he had no difficulty in earning a livelihood for himself, even when he persistently refused any help from Miss Gifford. But he had a far greater trouble than poverty, and—and I have that to tell you too, Nora."

Again Mark paused for a few moments, but Nora only waited in silence, sitting very still, and wondering why her heart began to beat so hurriedly.

Dr. Nuel Armstrong knew that Miss Gifford had risen more than once in her sleep, and quietly and correctly ministered to the sick lady who seemed—waking and sleeping—to be in her care ; but he chose to withhold his knowledge of this fact at the time when it would have left Arthur Poyntz free from suspicion—why did you start, my dearest ? Is that the first time I have mentioned Arthur's name ? He and my uncle were cousins, so I claim a kind of cousinship, too. Of course our name is the same. Had I not inherited the title, too, until he returned to receive it from me—his just due ? Do you wonder, Nora, as I did, why Dr. Armstrong should have suppressed this possible solution of the mystery of Mrs. Say's death, and let the vile suspicion of murder hurry her young heir to the grave—as he

thought? I can tell you now why it was. For some time a very beautiful Irish girl had been visiting an old friend of her mother's at the Heaton Vicarage, and Nuel Armstrong had chosen to fancy this girl for his wife. But Arthur Poyntz had learned by this time to love her for something even beyond her beauty—her rare and exquisite beauty," repeated Mark, laughing a little as he watched the colour rise in Nora's cheeks under his steadfast gaze, "and so one day they were quietly married by the Vicar, and she stayed on and on, and seemed to forget her Irish home. That was little wonder," continued Mark, warmly, "considering what a home it was; yet I have since then known a girl who could think lovingly and tenderly even of such a home as that. At the time of Mrs. Say's death, when Nuel Armstrong so promptly laid suspicion on Mrs. Say's heir, his jealousy had reached its climax, for he had been told by the Vicar himself of the marriage. You—you of all people, Nora—can understand, how little any conscientious scruple would stay Nuel Armstrong in his jealousy and revenge; for he was as pitiless and as selfish nineteen years ago, in his pursuit of your mother, as he has been in these later years——"

"*My mother!*"

Nora uttered the word very softly, with her fingers locked and her eyes wide and wistful. She had no thought for Nuel Armstrong. She had almost lost the story Mark had been telling her, in the new delicious pain of hearing her mother's name at last.

"Yes, mother, sweet," Mark answered, very gently. "The beautiful girl who came alone to Heaton, and was left here for so many months, unsummoned by her cold and selfish father, was your mother; and—and, Nora dearest, the young master of this old house, who has lain so long, and so unjustly, under the shadow of a great crime, is your father. My darling," he cried, taking her hands in his as she rose to her feet, "don't look so awed and bewildered. It will all seem natural to you very soon—when you have seen him. He only thought it would be best for me to prepare you. All that Nuel Armstrong told you of your father was a lie; coined to serve his own selfish purposes, and all the more a lie because it touched the truth. Dear, he never had a clue to your father's hiding-place; he never traced him and brought a letter from him—as you betrayed in your illness that he had said he had—and your father thought much more of keeping hidden from *him* than from anyone who bore his own title. You understand that now, don't you dearest? And presently you will understand how (to gratify both his passionate admiration for your beauty, and his cold and long-nursed revenge against your father) he strove with all his power to win your hand. There, we may let him rest. He has his wife with him now—poor girl!—poor girl!"

"And—my mother?" whispered Nora, not knowing what she asked, only longing to hear something of her.

"Your mother, dear," put in Miss Gifford, with a gentle kiss upon the girl's wistful face, "was my dear friend, though I scarcely ever could leave this house to see her, or ask her to come here. You are so like her, Nora, that it was no wonder my heart went out to you that first day Mark brought you to my cottage—when, I feel sure now, he had guessed a little of our story, and wished to see if I recognised your name. Nora, dear," she went on, her voice sinking lower, "it was not long after his escape that—she died. And then she sent her baby girl at once to her father, Colonel St. George, in Ireland. It was Rachel Corr who took you, and I believe your grandfather made her take an oath not to divulge the secret of your parentage; threatening afterwards—when she had married Corr—that he would turn her from her house as soon as ever he heard of her doing so."

"I—I understand," faltered Nora, recalling one other day when she had expected to meet her unknown father. "May I go to him?"

"He is here, Nora," said Mark, stroking her hair gently as he spoke. "Are you rested now, my own dear love? Ah! you cannot silence me any longer. I am breaking no promise. If I spent every moment of every hour in telling you how I love you (and I very easily and pleasantly could), and if I ceaselessly rehearsed our marriage topic, sweet, I should still break no promise now, for I am not Lord Keston—only plain Mark Poynz. Now we will—— Nora darling, see! There is the real Lord Keston."

Trembling so strangely and pitifully, that her hand went helplessly out seeking a support, Nora stood with her eyes fixed upon her father. Each moment her breath quickened, her eyes dilated, and her fingers grew tight and convulsive in their tension. Still she made no step forward to meet him, and no call upon his name passed her white, parted lips. Celia, with all her ready sympathy, could understand nothing of this intense and painful emotion; but yet, in an uncomprehended sorrow, she turned her face away, because she could not stop her tears. Mark, standing apart and resisting bravely his almost uncontrollable impulse to put his strong sustaining arm around the trembling figure, turned away too at last, his chest heaving, and the lines gathering in his forehead. Still the girl never stirred; only now one hand was lifted and pressed upon her heart, as if its throbbing had grown insupportable. With a troubled, torturing intentness, she read her father's face as he came up to her, her own growing whiter and whiter the while, and her eyes slowly darkening with a look which they had never known before. She was reading all the unuttered truth in that gaze of his; and when at last he called her by her name, she fell suddenly to her knees.

But when he raised her, and kissed her—kissed her again and again, on brow, and cheeks, and lips—then laid her head upon his breast, and whispered sweet and unknown words of endearment, she gently stole her arms around him, and the low broken cry of joy was for his ears alone—

“My father—my own father!”

She had known nothing of that likeness to her dead mother which had brought such immeasurable love into his eyes at sight of her. She had only seen the love there and known it by intuition to be a father's love. Instantly, in the intensity of that moment of doubt and hope and longing, the truth had rushed into her heart, and filled it to overflowing with this new, delicious joy.

And it was well that Mark had told the father so little of his child; for the glad surprise could make even *his* joy the greater in this hour.

CHAPTER LIII.

Boatman, take this triple fee,
For—invisibly to thee—
Spirits twain have crossed with me.

UHLAND.

THAT wonderful day at Heaton Place was over, but the old friends had not separated. They had walked together through the park to Miss Gifford's cottage; and now, in the bright and warm little drawing-room, they lingered as if they did not know how night and darkness had settled on the world without. There seemed so much to say, and somehow nothing ever could be said quite rationally, and without countless wild and happy interruptions.

The wonderful change in Miss Gifford riveted Nora's eyes so often that once or twice Mark intercepted his own laughing face, and reminded her that her eyes were too big to distend in astonishment. Then she would laugh too, with a little backward shake of her head, as a reproach to herself; but soon afterwards she would again find herself wondering over the difference that happiness could make in the dreamy, chastened face which had ever, until now, had such a settled shadow upon it.

“Of course you must be astonished at my happiness, Nora,” Miss Gifford whispered once, guessing that thought which made the girl so gladly watch her, “for you could never realize the weight which for so many years has pressed upon me in my solitude. Not of suspicion, dear—never that; only of such utter bewilderment and mystification. I could but live in the past, and the past was so *very* dark.”

“It must have been so utterly incomprehensible,” said Nora gently. “But no one will let you remember it now.” And Miss Gifford smiled in perfect certainty of this. knowing that,

humbly as Nora had expressed it, she herself would be one of the most skilled in teaching her to forget.

"What a crowd we look here!" laughed the Vicar, standing upon the rug, and looking around the bright little well filled room. "What intruders we are, Cis!" he added, turning to his wife.

"I really never appreciated the real comfort of my cottage until to-night," Miss Gifford answered, cordially. "I have rung for tea on purpose to see Nora presiding, for I can scarcely feel sure even yet that she is quite well again, unless I see her employed. Arthur, will you spare her?"

"I can plainly see," she added, presently, watching the look with which Lord Keston took his arm from around his daughter, as she stood beside him, "what trouble the mention of that illness gives you. But remember, Arthur, that but for Nora's fever, you and she might not have met."

"I remember," he said, with a gentle, earnest touch upon her hand. "That is one of the things which to-night it is so good to remember."

"Kate," he whispered, presently, his eyes following Nora to the tea table, "she is as beautiful as her mother, and more—more—*what* is it?"

"You will understand by-and-by," she answered, with a smile.

"This," said Lord Keston, standing to take his tea from Nora (for that one cup she would not let Mark carry), and looking round with rather a girlish dimness in his eyes, "is just my ideal of a home. I shall never be able to fit myself into any position of pomp or state again. Mark, you will have to relieve me of all that."

"But I don't understand it," observed Mark, just as coolly as if his face betrayed nothing of his immeasurable happiness to-night. "We have a villa in Florence, I believe, to which we retire—every man in our family—on his marriage. That's all I know of our future. I don't think we ever emerge from that spot alive; but I shall wait and see."

"I think I shall settle myself there for a time," returned the elder man, laughing a little; "and then I shall have a chance of seeing you and Nora during your travels. Judging from some stray remarks of yours, Poyntz, those travels are to extend into a remote century. But, at one time or other, you must needs visit Florence; and you shall find me there—with others of our old friends, I hope. But first," he went on, with growing earnestness, "I too must see the Irish home of my—my wife and child the home where each of them grew up to girlhood."

"Oh! father, yes," whispered Nora, still close at his side. "We will go to Traveere. And it will seem so different now I know that my mother lived there—solitary, too, as I did. And you will see all the old——"

They were unshed tears that stayed the words, to Celia's great

dismay ; for how, she thought, could Nora care for that grim, comfortless old house, when she could live now in such a home as Heaton Place ? And how, in this peaceful, pretty valley, could she think tenderly of that chill, bare bog ?

"Nora," asked Mark—she had re-taken her seat at the tea-table, and he sat down near her, leaning forward to address her very earnestly—"May I ask Mr. Pennington to marry us at Kilver ? Will you not like it to be in the old church you have known so well, and by the old friend of whom you are so fond ? Say *yes*, my dearest. You shall have no trouble beyond that."

"There is no trouble in that," said Nora, simply, but with the brightest, swiftest blush. "It is a very easy word to say, Mark."

"Thank you—thank you, my own love," he whispered, from his full glad heart. "That is what I have long been wishing."

Then, somehow, it seemed as if everyone had something to say in favour of this plan, and said it in a merry, glad excitement, which reached even to Nora, when Mark had so tenderly, yet so laughingly, won her from her sudden shyness.

And Mr. and Mrs. Pennington entered into the plan most heartily, and made wild assertions of how many the Vicarage would hold.

"What a rest it will be for us to escape, just at present, the inevitable rejoicings here," Lord Keston said, with a mischievous glance into his daughter's face, as he stroked the short locks of bright soft hair. "You will be more ready for them at your home-coming. But Mrs. Pennington, will you really take all this trouble for us ?"

"Trouble !" echoed the Vicar, genially. "All I can say is, that if Nora had decided to be married in any other church, I should have—should have been very much disappointed in her."

They all laughed at this fierce conclusion, but then to-night they were ready to laugh at so little.

"I have always wished, my dear," put in Mrs. Pennington, answering Nora's questioning glance and smile, "that you should, if possible, be married from the Vicarage ; and of course you know how Celia has always wished it too, and determined to be your bridesmaid. We always consider you an Irish girl, you know—your father, I can see, will excuse me if I say I consider you so even yet—and so of course you ought to be married in an Irish church. I am quite well now—you say Brighton air has cured me ; but I say it was finding you again, my dear—and so we will do wonders at the Vicarage, and you shall see how many it will hold at a push. Nat and Tom will be wild with joy to have you there ; and I shall not be afraid of your leading them into mischief now, because Mr. Poyntz will be with you."

"We shall be at Traveere, Mrs. Pennington," said Mark, hastening to lighten the trouble she had so willingly appropriated. "Don't you guess how delighted I shall be to exhibit my

productive Irish estate to my own guests? Doyle hates Traveere (though I know he will come over to see Nora married), but Lord Keston, I hope, will stay with me there, and Foster. Miss Pennington, will you help me to tempt him over to assist your father in his arduous task? I cannot be married except by my own clergyman, any more than Nora can be married except by hers."

"Oh! that will be nice," cried Nora, with involuntary gladness, when she saw Celia's blushing pleasure. But she soon repented the prompt exclamation, because Mark insisted on interpreting it in his own way.

Then there were countless questions of Nora's to be answered by Mark, who, though he had not lately been in Ireland, yet seemed to know everything she asked, whether of Rachel, of Kitty, of old Breen, or of the stray animals at Traveere.

Rachel Corr was to come and made her home again in the old spot, for Lord Keston had decided to give her one of the lodges at Heaton Place, and then Micky could live with her. Kitty would never leave Traveere, nor would Breen, if he could help it. Bran, poor fellow, had been shot some time ago; but Borak flourished still.

To all that Mark could tell her of the old home or friends, Nora listened eagerly; but it was soon told; and then they willingly resumed the discussion of their own immediate plans.

"I wonder," said the Vicar, thoughtfully, "whether we could not persuade Mrs. Foster to come to Kilver with her son. We must try. I think the change might do her good just now. Miss Genevieve will have left her, and she always seems well content to be with Will."

"The change will do her good in more ways than one," said Miss Gifford, involuntarily. "I think with Celia's gentle and constant attention, she will find it hard to fret even for her absent daughters."

"Mr. Pennington," said Mark, anxiously, as they stood to separate, after much merriment and laughter, "I hope you have taken all these arrangements in earnest. I never in my life was half so much in earnest as I am now."

"Or half so happy, Mr. Poyntz?" put in Celia, in her gentle way, as she looked wonderingly into his face.

"Or half so happy," he replied, with an intense earnestness which she had not expected; for just then Nora came up to her side, with still the brilliant light of joy within her eyes which had made everyone that day wonder over her beauty, just as her father did; for it seemed a new thing even to all these old friends, as it was to him.

"I only wish," Nora said gently, "that Will had come with us to-day."

"Better not," Mark answered briefly, yet with a tone of trouble in his voice.

"Nora, darling," he added afterwards to her alone, leading her on into the porch, "you understood what I meant about Foster. It will be all well in time for him, I firmly believe, but not quite yet, sweetheart; and I, of all men in the world, must try to soften the sorrow for him. Oh! child, so well beloved, can I ever forget how near I too have been to losing you? But," he added, with a sudden change of tone, as he folded her cloak more carefully around her, and gave her his first kiss, "surely very soon now Foster will see happiness lying in store for him—a happiness which will be perfect for him by-and-by. Nora, don't you already see with what pathetic surprise and enjoyment Mrs. Foster accepts from Celia the love and care which have never yet been really given her by a daughter. And when you and I have left them in Ireland, after our marriage——"

"I wonder," observed Nora, gravely, looking out into the darkness of the park, just as if her blush could be seen if she did not, "whether there is any change in that orange banner in Kilver church, or whether it still always falls into one huge dusty fold, to hide the long nose of our dear Orange King, and make his profile into one perpendicular line."

CHAPTER LIV.

They err who say life is not sweet,
Though cares be long and pleasures fleet.

LOOKING like a speck on the wide stretch of bog, a curious machine was creeping slowly along the road between Kilver Vicarage and Traveere; and but for the fresh and girlish laughter which proceeded from it now and then, in its rather frequent pauses, it would have worn a somewhat funereal aspect.

"Don't you feel exactly like old times, Mr. Poyntz?"

Nora asked this question gravely, as she sat (very upright and content) on her side the jolting old car from Traveere, and looked affectionately down upon Borak.

"If old times feel very comfortable, as a rule; and—progressive," returned Mark, from his side the car, "my feelings resemble them exactly."

"I'm afraid," said Nora, her eyes wandering thoughtfully on beyond Borak's ears, "that I don't feel so changed as—as anyone *else* would be, by all I have learnt and felt since you drove me here before, Mark. I feel so happy, and—and quite young again; yet I ought to be very different."

"You ought," returned Mark, in his leisurely way, "to be a grave and elderly party with a mission. And you ought never even to smile; yet I have lately heard you laugh, just as if you were still the same Nora to whom I gave——"

"Why did you stop?" she asked, simply. "Were you going to say to whom you gave such good advice that day?"

"That," assented Mark, with gravity, "is naturally my predominant reminiscence of the day."

You are not altered either—now," said Nora; and she could not help that beautiful soft light coming into her eyes as she turned them upon his face.

"Then you ought to address me decorously as *Mr. Bull*."

"Oh, Mark," she cried, with a peal of sweetest laughter, "how trying your memory is! But," she added, with sudden demureness, as she folded her hands in her lap, "you called me *Miss Paddy*—just as you would now if I gave you the least encouragement. No, you are not altered in the slightest."

"Not since that day," acquiesced Mark, composedly. "But if you had chanced to know me *before* that day, Nora—of course without my knowing you—you would have detected just a little change now; just a little," he added, unconscious of the great earnestness in his voice. "But life has never worn a natural tint to me since even the very beginning of that drive."

"Of that very drive? Why?"

"A very stupid reason, Miss Paddy, for a man of my years to confess to; but—I fell in love—— With Borak," he added, coolly, as he left his seat and walked round to her side the car; to ease the weight for Borak, as she knew; but, also, she feared to see the blush she tried to hide.

"I am afraid you didn't quite appreciate poor Borak that day, Mark—didn't admire him very much, I mean. I've thought since—especially the first time I saw you driving your own horses—that you must have felt rather impatient with him once or twice when he used to stop."

"You did not think so on that day, and I simply decline to connect any later thoughts with that time. To tell you the truth, though, sweetheart, the more he crawled along this dear old road, the more I admired his paces; and whenever he stopped to take breath (and he certainly did it pretty frequently) I literally adored him. In fact my sentiments towards Borak combined a pleasant feeling of friendliness with a deep and respectful homage."

"See," she exclaimed, suddenly, and with genuine admiration, "he is going straight to Rachel's cabin. He hasn't grown out of any of his old thoughtful habits. How many and many a time has he waited for me here, just exactly the length of time I wanted; and taken me straight home—all of his own accord."

"But this," said Mark, gently, as he lifted her from her seat, "will be the last time, my own dear love."

Nora had so much to say to her old nurse—especially about that pretty home which awaited her in England, and where she would have Micky with her—that when Mark showed her how

Borak, feeling himself sufficiently refreshed, was walking solemnly on, she had still left unsaid the one thing which had made her heart so full, all the while she sat in the neat little kitchen, looking often at the pretty sketch of her own home, and feeling Rachel so much nearer to her from having known her father so well.

"I know—I know it all, Miss Nora dear," Rachel said, when at last Nora tried to tell her. "Lord Keston has been here already—he is not one to forget an old servant. He sat here for an hour this morning, and he told me everything. He told me of his return to England, and of the old home. He told me of Miss Kate, and how she, too, would come to see me to-day. He told me how you all arrived with him last night, and that the marriage was to be here, and so soon. He said Mr. Foster had come too, to help our Vicar; and that his mother was here with him, and already enjoying herself. And that Mr. Foster had gone over to Kilver this morning. And he told me—even laughing, and he was never one to laugh much—that Mr. Poyntz had taken the old horse and car over to the Vicarage to fetch you, and had had to mend the wheel himself before he could start; and of Kitty's delight, and everything. Oh! my dear, what a glad coming back this is!"

"Nora," said Mark, as they walked after Borak, while he sedately led the way in the empty car, "do you know, I think that we shall not lose our clergyman at Heaton, even though the living *is* to be a wedding gift for the husband of your true little friend."

"Oh, I hope not!" she answered, earnestly. "Will and Celia could make each other so happy."

"Indeed they could, and will, I think, Nora," Mark said, taking her face between his hands in the quiet road, and kissing her upon the lips, "how generous he was in his greeting to you, after—after he knew you were lost to him. It reminded me of your own description of him, on that day we drove along the bog before."

"You remember that drive quite well?"

"Pretty well, considering all things. I have a faint recollection of your informing me, as a fact beyond dispute, that England abounded in beautiful, highly-educated, and altogether charming Rosalinds, among whom I roamed at large; and that you thought it would be an excellent thing for you to have a few of their advantages."

"Oh, Mark, I never thought——"

"Also," he went on, tranquilly, "that Foster was a very celebrated man in this country, and that I was welcome to consume into an early grave with jealousy, if I chose. Poor Will!—No, I will never say *poor Will* again. His eyes are opened now, and one can see what happiness is in store for him."

"I believe," interpolated Nora, "that you must have forgotten the cheerful career you marked out for yourself, Mr. Poynz : when you should be *Fifty years of age and unmarried*. I always had a great wish to give something to that hospital."

"Indeed ! The only observation I ever heard from you about it, was that the inmates must be very unusually comfortable, under those circumstances. Still of course you might have been secretly devoting your wealth to that good cause."

"I used to think," said Nora presently, her voice growing full of thought, "how I would come back to Ireland after my holiday summer was over, and use the money grandpa left me, to give ease and comfort to those who, though they lived around him, had never been helped, perhaps, at all, in those old days. But it is no use thinking of that, because the money is not mine."

"I'm not myself quite so confident upon that head, dearest I believe Doyle intends to claim it for you, in consequence of the peculiar wording of Colonel St. George's letter ; as his term is *your guilty father*—you understand how Doyle intends to dispute that adjective. And then, my love, you can do as you will with the pocket-money, you know."

"And if I *have* forfeited it, as I have always imagined, I have found my father, Mark, and so it is well forfeited. I mean," she added, softly, laying her hand upon his, "*you* found him for me. Yet I had thought," she whispered presently, with a shudder at the remembrance, "it was only Nuel Armstrong who could unite us. He—he said that ought to be my love-test. Mark."

"And was it not, sweetheart ?"

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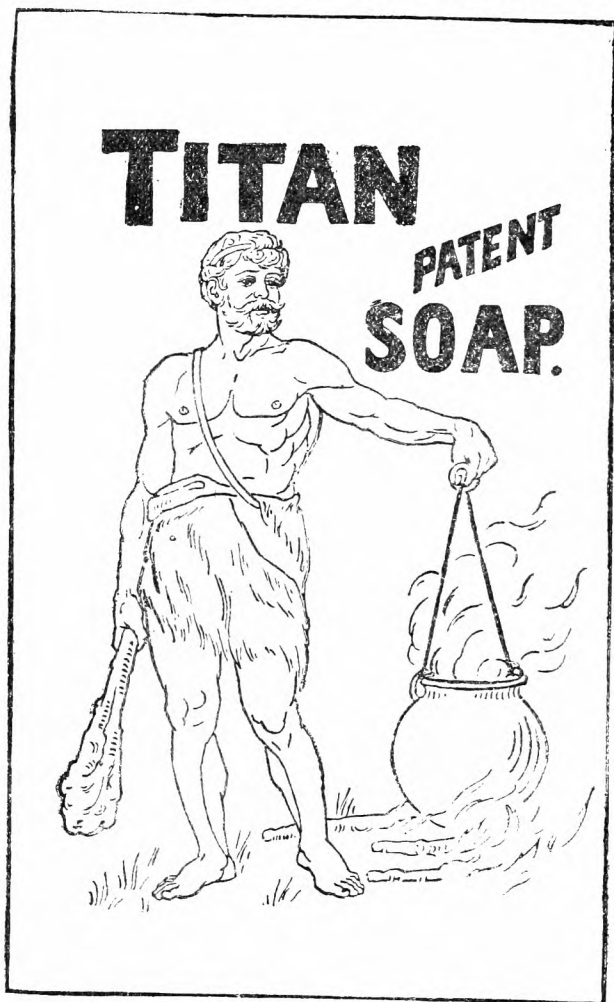
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THE manufacture of this splendid and novel Toilet Soap, the ingredients of which are entirely edible, is conducted on the most approved scientific principles; by which means every species of impurity is carefully eliminated, leaving the completed Soap absolutely pure and neutral. To this is added during the finishing process at least 5 per cent. of Juvenia Cream in an unsaponified condition, the result being that while, during the process of washing, the pores of the skin are completely cleansed, they are anointed with a preparation possessing the most extraordinary powers of penetrating, softening and soothing the skin. This Soap is innocent of any colouring matter, being pure white, and its perfume is most fragrant and delicate.

JUVENIA SOAP, as its name indicates, is manufactured specially with the object of preserving, during succeeding years, the soft skin and delicate complexion of Youth; it also possesses marvellous powers of rejuvenescence, rendering the skin (which from age or other causes may have become deteriorated) soft and supple, and producing a charming and delicate complexion.

To thoroughly enjoy the benefits of F. S. CLEAVER'S JUVENIA PREPARATIONS, the Soap should be used exclusively during the day, and the Cream applied before retiring at night.

